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Gnome

MANY of my readers have voiced disquiet and concern about the possible sale of my flagship Daily Gnomograph to a German consortium headed by Herr Axel Grease.

Older readers, remembering ancient hostilities between our two great countries, have expressed their fears that the paper might even be renamed Der Telegraf-Spee, and feature recipes for sauerkraut and other Germanic delicacies in the cookery column.

It has even been rumoured that Herr Grease has insisted on printing the crossword in German.

Let me assure readers that these rumours are as false as they are inevitable.

I have Herr Grease's personal guarantee that if his bid succeeds, the Gnomograph will remain as boring as it has always been and that a picture of Liz Hurley will continue to feature on the front page.

E. Strobes
pp. Lord Gnome
Canary War
Deutschlands
(Surely Docklands? Ed.)

"They'll never get it finished on time"

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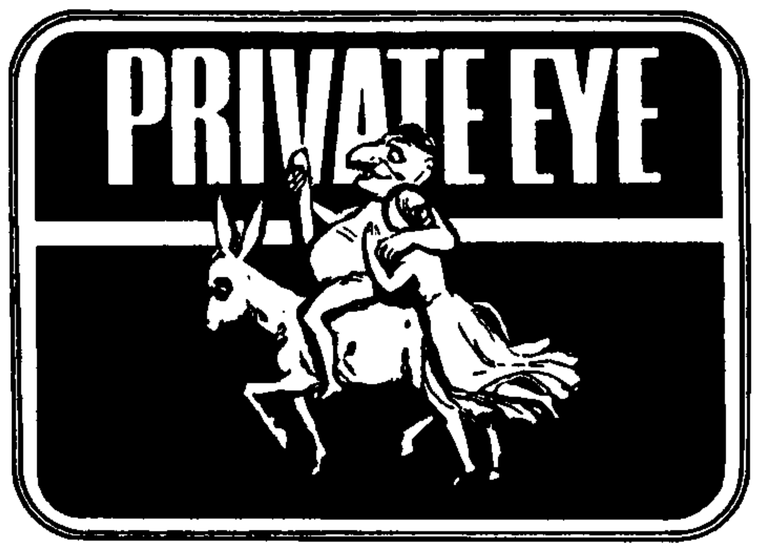

Say it with flour...

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THE national audit office (NAO), whose job is to protect the nation's accounts, has produced a whitewash of Hutton proportions about the Mapeley affair.

The NAO is not in the least concerned that 600 Inland Revenue and customs buildings were sold to a company in a tax haven, and even less concerned that government departments sought to cover this up in their accounts.

On the contrary, the report hails the Mapeley deal as a blessing. It says the government got "a good price" and "followed procurement law throughout the process". Indeed, the report is rather irritated that "the government has responded to the tax issues raised in the deal by suggesting a new clause for future PFI contracts that limits the ability of the contractors to go offshore [ie avoid tax]." The report concludes snottily: "It remains to be seen how it [the new government strategy to stop PFI tax avoidance] will work in practice."

But almost in spite of itself, the NAO has come up with some interesting figures about the deal. The first is Mapeley's claim in 2001 that the company had a "serious cash flow problem with an annual shortfall of some £27m". This amounts over the period of the contract to £540m, which would make the deal £240m more expensive than the public sector comparator (what it would have cost under normal public spending rules).

The report confirms that Mapeley used the threat of its own bankruptcy to demand more money from the government (ie taxpayers). Negotiations about this have been going on for much more than a year now. The Inland Revenue tells *Private Eye* there is still no decision about how much more Mapeley will be paid, so no one can say whether the eventual price to taxpayers will end up as marvellous as the NAO pretends.

THERE are some who say the split capital investment swindle is even more shocking than the great pensions mis-selling scandal of the early 1990s. They are wrong by a few billion, but the extent of this latest swindle is indeed staggering.

Pretty well all the funds "invested" (at least £600m) have gurgled down the drain. The regulator, the financial services authority (FSA), backed by the financial ombudsman service (FOS), has been desperately trying to get the companies to compensate at least some of the people they swindled. To its shock and horror, the companies' response appears to be to raise two fingers to both regulators.

In a note to its latest accounts early in May, Aberdeen Asset Management – which heads the field in the split capital swindle and whose directors were roasted by the treasury select committee – says that the financial ombudsman service has recently judged a case brought by a swindled investor and has suggested a sum in compensation. The note to the accounts observes: "After careful consideration of the provisional assessment, the board believes it does not reflect the weight of evidence which Aberdeen has supplied... the board cannot agree with the FOS adjudicator's opinion in this case."

Accordingly, it is not going to pay a penny, and has referred the case back to the FOS "for determination". The real worry for companies like Aberdeen is that they can't afford the suggested compensation, which could force them to the wall.

CONCERN over American forces' use of torture will not be news to US vice-president Dick Cheney. He was warned about the practice as long ago as 1992 when he was defence secretary under George Bush Snr.

In 1988 US senators investigated claims that American-backed "counter insurgency" operations in Central and South America, particularly Honduras, had included abusive interrogations. The senators were shocked to discover that two CIA manuals used to train interrogators recommended torture. They included techniques similar to those that have been used more recently at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

After the senate investigation the CIA added a new preface to the manuals, stating: "The use of force, mental torture, threats, insults or exposure to inhumane treatment of any kind as an aid to interrogation is prohibited by law, both international and domestic; it is neither authorized nor condoned." However, the National Security Archive, a historical project at George Washington University, uncovered a 1992 memo to Cheney warning that, even after the 1988 investigations the US government was still circulating Spanish language guidebooks with the torture instructions.

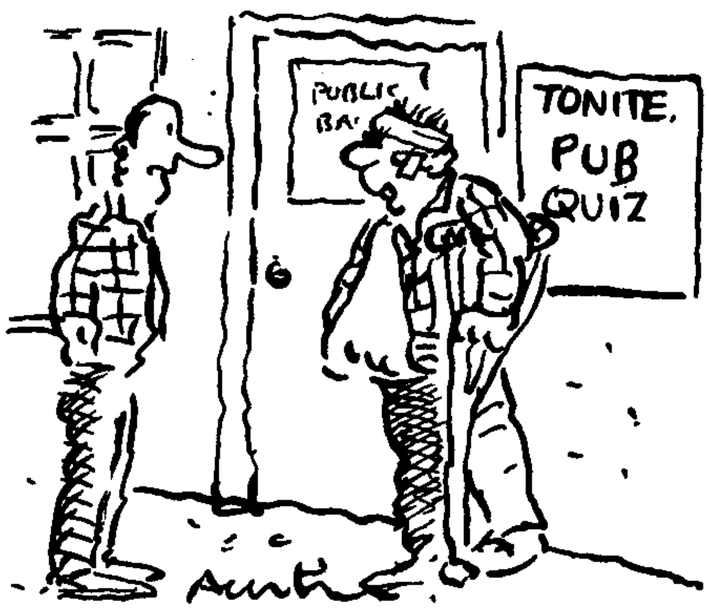
It warned Cheney that the "offensive and objectionable material in the manuals... undermines US credibility and could result in significant embarrassment".

The memo was stamped "SECDEF HAS SEEN", and Cheney scribbled on it "I concur" referring to the recommendations that the manuals be withdrawn and the human rights component of military training be re-emphasised.

The senate investigations that led to the 1992 memo to Cheney were spurred by revelations of torture by US-backed forces in Honduras. The US ambassador to Honduras, who was implicated in the scandal, was one John Negroponte. Mr Negroponte is now the US ambassador to... Iraq.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Iraqis are sick of foreign people coming in their country and trying to destabilise their country, and we will help them rid Iraq of these killers."
– George W. Bush, Al Arabiya TV



"A bloke from the US army was asking the questions"

Street Of Shame

ONE of Conrad Black's most distinguished ex-editors has sent the following letter to the *Daily Telegraph*:

"Sir: Bearing in mind where her husband may end up, isn't Barbara Amiel rather unwise to write in such a cavalier fashion about prison atrocities? Yours faithfully, Peregrine Worsthorne."

Surprisingly, the *Telegraph* has so far declined to print Sir Peregrine's thoughtful contribution.

EASTON Neston, Lord Hesketh's Northamptonshire estate, is up for sale at an asking price of £50m.

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* Hesketh boasts that Margaret Thatcher stayed there the weekend after her resignation, yet he omits to mention an equally distinguished former visitor – the *Independent* columnist Bruce "Brute" Anderson, who used to be a regular guest at Hesketh's shooting parties.

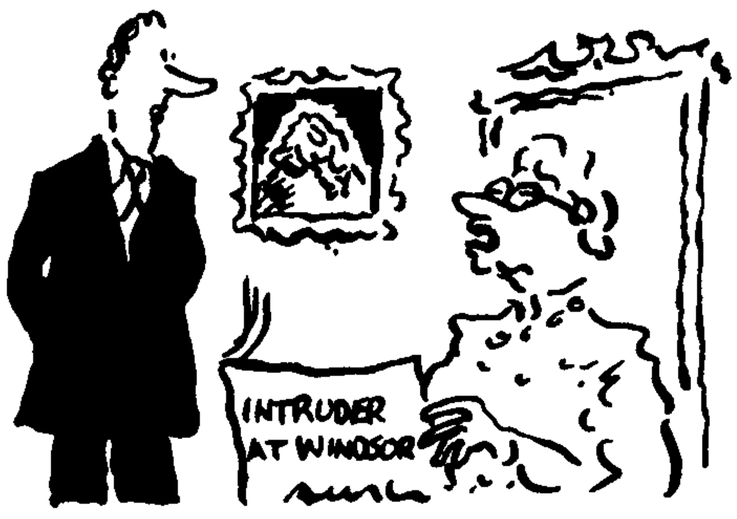
At the end of one such weekend, after Anderson had departed for London, Hesketh was alarmed to find one of the maids in tears. Had the burly pundit inflicted his famously rough seduction technique on her? Far worse. Retiring to bed drunkenly the previous night, he had felt an urgent need to empty his bowels. Too weary to stagger down the corridor to the lavatory, he had simply defecated where he lay – and set off the next morning leaving his soiled sheets on the bed for the maid to find. To compound the offence, the oafish hack didn't even leave her a tip.

An outraged Lady Hesketh banned Anderson from Easton Neston for life. Any new owners who find the Brute angling for an invitation would do well to follow her example.

FLEET STREET'S armchair warriors thrilled to the news last week that soldiers of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had defeated a large force of Shia militiamen in Iraq in an action involving bayonet charges – the first by British troops since the Falklands war.

No one loves the flash of cold steel more than a tabloid sub-editor, and the hacks had a field day. "Bayonet Brits kill 35 rebels" drooled the *Sun*. "Our boys' victory in brave charge", said the *Daily Star*. The *Daily Mail* reminded readers that the Argylls formed the Thin Red Line at Balaclava, while the *Grauniad*'s Stephen Moss mused upon the "psychosexual effect on the user" of fixing a bayonet to one's weapon.

Among all the lovingly-reported detail of Iraqi bodies strewn across the highway and floating in the river, no one stopped to ask *why* the Argylls had used bayonets. The *Eye* has learned that the soldiers involved are furious at the gung-ho press coverage because it ignored the actual reason – that the ill-supplied Argylls were so short of ammunition that they had no choice but to resort to the bayonet or be killed.



"Count the tupperware"

THE MORONIC INFERNO

THE *Daily Mirror* of 19 May carried a thunderous editorial warning against the dangers of the Compensation Culture. "All of us should realise," it opined, "that demands for compensation are not a way to get-rich-quick. They make most of us poorer."

By a curious coincidence, this came just a couple of days after sacked editor Piers "Morgan" Moron threatened to sue the *Mirror* if it didn't impoverish itself by handing over a £1.5m pay-off.

But what are Piers' own views on compensation for sacked executives? To judge by the "Voice of the *Mirror*" columns during his editorship, he feels very strongly indeed about it. "Something sick lies at the heart of business in the UK," his paper declared in September 2001. "The worse job a boss does, the bigger his pay-off when he is forced out."

How very prescient. When Moron took over the *Mirror* it sold more than 2,500,000 copies a day, but now it sells 1,900,000. So the pay-off he is demanding works out at roughly £2.50 for every reader lost.

ONE point Piers Morgan's lawyers might make in their efforts to wrest as much cash as possible out of his ex-employers is that *Mirror* managers have actively approved the printing of fake pictures in the past.

In August 1997, the *Mirror*'s front page featured a picture of Princess Diana appearing to kiss her then boyfriend Dodi Fayed on board a Mediterranean yacht. Challenged on the photos' veracity, Morgan happily admitted that they were fakes: in the original, far from kissing Diana, Dodi had been looking in the opposite direction. The *Mirror*'s picture desk digitally "flipped" his head and moved the couple a bit closer, for good measure, a blatant breach of the press complaints commission code.

In the face of noisy condemnation from the rest of Fleet Street, Morgan rehearsed the "true representation" defence he would later use over the "torture" pics: "I totally deny we changed the image integrity of that picture. It was quite clear 24 hours later that those two heads had been considerably closer than our picture." On that occasion, however, he was given the full backing of Sly Bailey's predecessor as Mirror CEO, David Montgomery, who, it emerged, not only approved the splash, but even wrote the headline.

THE valedictory profiles of Piers Morgan which were being hastily cobbled together even as he was being frogmarched from the *Mirror*'s offices all agreed on one thing: he can look forward to a lucrative career in television following the success of his series *Tabloid Tales* on BBC1.

But can he? Morgan did not land the TV gig through talent but because of the contact book he brought with him from Canary Wharf: the BBC was guaranteed unlimited publicity for the programme in Britain's third-best-selling paper, while the only incentive for celebs like Victoria Beckham and Jordan to appear was to get on the right side of the notoriously partisan presenter and guarantee themselves some favourable coverage in his paper for a while. Morgan without the day-job is of little interest either to producers or potential guests, who will head for Jonathan Ross or ITV and Parky if they fancy an easier ride.

Viewers, meanwhile, have already voted with their remote controls. Morgan managed to shed a third of his audience between the first and second series of the show: nine million people – which is even more than he drove away from the *Mirror* during his editorship.

GAFFE-prone former spin-doctor Charlie Whelan was quick to rush to the aid of his chum and occasional employer, Piers Moron.

Piers, he wrote in his *PR Week* column two weeks ago, would have had to spend millions to get the amount of publicity his paper has had in recent weeks. "Maybe some coverage hasn't been that positive," he conceded, "but that won't bother *Mirror* bosses one iota. This is definitely a case of all publicity being good."

He continued: "I never believed Piers's head was on the block, but when Tony Blair had to publicly apologise for the behaviour of our boys, there was no doubt the editor's job was safe."

This appeared in *PR Week* on 14 May – the day Moron was sacked.

"FERTILITY doctors were baffled when a perfectly-healthy couple claimed they couldn't have children – until they confessed they had never made love," reported the *Mirror* last week, telling the story of a German couple from a very religious community who didn't know what sex was.

Doubters immediately raised eyebrows at a story that sounded so much like an urban legend, although the story was full of quotes from the University Clinic of Luebeck – identifiable as the UniKlinik Lübeck.

The story was written by Berlin-based freelancer Allan Hall. When the *Eye* contacted Hall to ask where the story came from he snapped: "It was in *Bild am Sonntag* [a German tabloid] and the *Medical Tribune*." Er, no. There was a recent story about a Lübeck couple who sought fertility treatment in the German *Medical Tribune*, but the cause of their celibacy was erectile dysfunction, not ignorance. *Bild am Sonntag* actually reported the story fairly accurately, quoting "*potenzprobleme*" as the cause. He quickly changed his story to "someone at the clinic told me."

Back in February Hall was at it again with a gruesome tale of a man in Dortmund who was eaten by his pet spiders. "More than 200 spiders, several snakes, a gecko called Helmut and several thousand termites gorged on their former master for days," he reported in the *Mirror*. The story also appeared under his by-line in the *Sun*, saying "giant webs draped him, spiders were all over him".

"That was in *Bild* too," insisted Hall. And, yes, a tale of a dead man with a lot of pet spiders did appear in the German press. But German animal protection charity Arche 90, which was called in by police to deal with the creatures, said the body was intact when it was found and the man's many pets were safely in their tanks and cages. "No freely running spiders were discovered in the house," they said.

In an article in the *Evening Standard* last year, Hall reported that "a little bit of lying is good for us, according to German scientists." At least that story appears to be accurate.

WITH Euro 2004 looming, what better time to plug the *Torygraph*'s sports department into the pisspoor new £20m computer system which has already caused an RSI epidemic elsewhere in the building? To ease any potential problems, every member of the sports production team is to be shadowed by a computer boffin.

To make room for the extra bodies, the graphics department was booted out of its space between sport and news and banished to a grotty cavern on the floor below. The graphics people resisted, arguing that since they work most closely with news, they should at least be on the same floor. "Well if you can do better," trilled the architect, "you do it!"

As Tower Hamlets environmental health officers know, space at the *Torygraph* is notoriously tight. But the graphics team eventually settled on a little-used room between the gents toilets and the office of Sue "Sally Jockstrap" Mott. Accordingly they packed their bags and readied for the move. At which point managing editor Sue Ryan thundered: "You can't have that room. I use it for Pilates on Thursday lunchtimes."

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Ruling Offers Taste of Cheap Ale... The prospect of cheaper beer in pubs shuffled tantalisingly closer yesterday after a landmark decision in the court of appeal."

— *Grauniad*, 22 May, p.9.

"Headlines promising the decision will mean cheap beer for all are daft."

— *Grauniad*, 22 May, p.25.

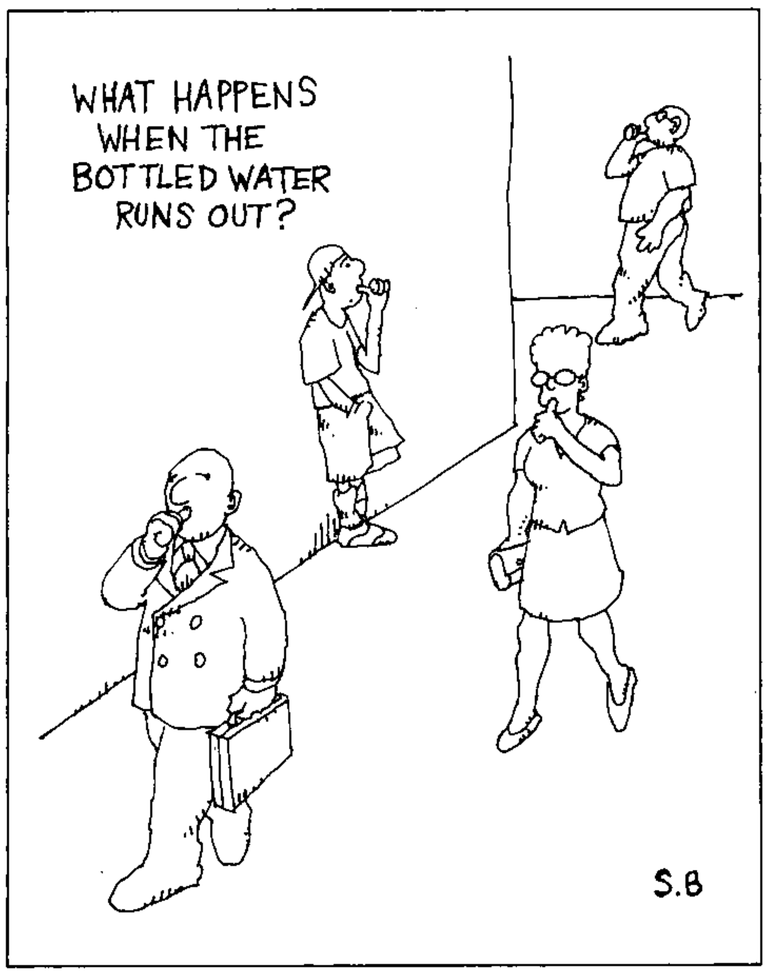
WHEN David Rose joined the rush of commentators disowning the Iraq adventure after the Abu Ghraib torture revelations, he confessed in the London *Evening Standard* that: "I look back with shame and disbelief. The support I gave to the war of Bush and Blair now seems as misplaced and naive as that of the hapless Tommies, cheering as they boarded their troop trains in 1914, assured by their leaders that it would all be over by Christmas".

He began his *mea culpa* in the *Standard* saying he had "looked forward to the coming war with fierce enthusiasm – not because I was worried about Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction, but because of his appalling record in abusing human rights." If Rose wasn't worried about WMDs, why did he work so hard to make sure his readers were scared stiff of them?

In November 2001 he wrote a 2,500-word article in the *Observer* claiming that Saddam was linked to Osama Bin Laden and behind the Twin Towers attacks. He also suggested that officials "suspect the anthrax which has so far killed four people in America has an ultimate Iraqi origin". As the *Eye* has already revealed, the once-exiled Iraqi National Congress (INC) has effectively invoiced the American government for the assistance it gave with this article. It also cited an article Rose wrote on Iraq for *Vanity Fair* as justification for its continued funding by the US government.

Rose went on to write many pieces on Iraq's supposed WMD. In September 2002 in the *Observer* he attacked former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter, who had claimed – accurately, it turns out – that Iraq had no WMD. Rose rubbished Ritter's assertions, arguing that "while the doves claim there is no evidence Saddam has tried to rebuild his weapons since 1998, the evidence is, in fact, a great deal stronger." In the same year Rose wrote in *Vanity Fair* that Iraq was developing "dirty" nuclear bombs bought from eastern European smugglers, while Saddam was making progress with chemical and biological weapons.

US journalists like Judith Miller of the *New York Times,* who also promoted tales of Iraq's WMD with the help of the INC, have faced public questioning. But their counterparts in the UK like David Rose are allowed to change their tune with no questions asked.



HATCHETWATCH

Alison Boshoff

IN OCTOBER 1998 the *Daily Telegraph* published its biggest-ever apology, filling much of page 3, and paid £100,000 damages to Liam Neeson and Natasha Richardson for claiming falsely that their marriage was in trouble. The hackette responsible for this disaster, Alison Boshoff, was promptly hired by the *Daily Mail*.

Shome mishtake? Not at all. The *Mail* already employed Geoffrey Levy, pioneer of the 2,000-word celebrity hatchet-job once parodied by Craig Brown thus: "Over the years the Virgin Mary has gone to desperate lengths to build up a reputation for simplicity and devotion... But who, close friends are beginning to ask, is the *real* Virgin Mary?" Boshoff's own mastery of the genre rivals that of Levy himself – and although she now works part-time, after having a baby, motherhood has done nothing to blunt her hatchet. Here are a few scalpels...

Liz Hurley: "As she frolicked in the surf on Mustique yesterday during a ten-day holiday with boyfriend Arun Nayar, Elizabeth Hurley must at least have been satisfied that her dignity remains intact." (10/11/03.) Luckily, Boshoff is here to puncture the satisfaction. "One must hope," she adds, "that the 'heavy bickering' which has characterised their relationship of late will not ruin the fun."

Zoe Ball and Norman Cook: As Boshoff reveals (29/12/03), they have had "a lot to cheer about" since being "happily reconciled" after a wobble in their marriage. "Now, say those who know them, there is even talk about the couple having another baby." But wait. "Will their new life at last make Zoe happy?" A new baby might bring "anguish", Boshoff warns, and keeping their marriage alive will be "no easy task".

Les Dennis: "The attractions of the Caribbean in winter would be enough to put a smile on anyone's face, you might think." Actually, this being a piece by Boshoff (17/1/04), you would think nothing of the kind. "As he reclines on a sun lounger, Les Dennis is a picture of misery. His features are crumpled into a depressed frown, his eyes are puffy and he seems to have the cares of the world on his shoulders." Hooray!

Madonna: "So has Madonna had a facelift?" Boshoff asks (11/2/04). "Would Madge have gone that far to keep up with today's divas?" Even with surgery, Boshoff advises, Madonna "cannot hope to catch glorious, golden Beyoncé, only 22". It's high time she "conceded defeat to the new generation".

Jerry Hall: "So what is going on with Jerry?" Boshoff demands (9/3/04), noting that Hall is still single many years after parting from Mick Jagger. "How sad indeed that Jerry, a devoted mother who is acknowledged to be one of the world's great beauties, should fail to find a suitable companion."

Lenny Kravitz: "So," Boshoff inquires, after his split from Nicole Kidman, "what went wrong? And why is Kravitz – nicknamed Lenny the Loin – unable to sustain a commitment to a woman as talented and beautiful as Nicole Kidman?" (29/1/04). It turns out to be a self-answering question: Boshoff explains that, er, he "can't commit". Or can he? In a piece about Lenny the Loin only three months earlier (18/10/03), she concluded that he "certainly seems to be the marrying kind" and "is not shy of commitment".

Tom Cruise: "So," Boshoff asks, licking her lips, "why is Cruise unable to find love? And what does the end of his latest affair say about the emotional health of an actor facing one of the most precarious periods of his career remarkably but by his own choice alone?" (27/3/04). She decides that Cruise is "emotionally closed". No wonder he is "left with an empty personal life".

Sting: "So what is the truth about Sting's sex-life?" Boshoff wonders (8/5/04), following the revelation that he and his wife Trudie Styler often visit lapdancing clubs. "Who IS the real Sting?" Boshoff offers her own expert assessment: he's "unsavoury", "childish", "an egoist, narcissist and misanthrope".

Geri Halliwell: "The journey back to health for Geri Halliwell has been a long one," Boshoff notes (20/4/04). "And although she has claimed for the past three years to have her eating disorders under control, friends now admit she is only just putting those demons to rest." Still, now that she's put them to rest, and acquired a healthy and voluptuous figure, surely there's a happy ending to the story? Not so fast. "Her curvaceous figure," Boshoff believes, "has been won at an extraordinary cost... The fact is that she remains very much alone." So that's all right then.

SUN editrix Rebekah Wade, scourge of paedophiles everywhere, continues her odd obsession with Emma Watson, who plays Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter films.

Two years ago, when the last film in the series opened, the *Sun*'s front page featured a picture of 12-year-old Watson captioned "Hermione Looks Magic".

This week, in a "World Exclusive", the *Sun* devoted a double page spread to photos showing how the 14-year-old is "Growing up... Emma has turned into a teen beauty" while reporter Grant Rollings grilled her on which adults she fancied and revealed the exciting news that "she WILL have romantic scenes in the fourth Potter movie".

ONE of Piers Morgan's last acts before walking the plank was to promote hackette Rosa Prince to the *Mirror*'s political team. Since then Prince and Gary Jones, who was to have become political editor, have been told to stay in their old jobs for the time being.

If Prince does make it to Westminster, one can only hope that her passion for politics has risen somewhat in recent years. During the general election of 1997 she did a stint of work experience with Vincent Hanna on *The Week in Politics* and his other election TV programmes.

Impressed that she had managed to get such a plum posting at such a momentous time, a friend from the *Liverpool Daily Post* (where Prince had also done work experience) asked what the atmosphere in the studio had been like on election night.

"I don't know," Rosa replied. "I was lucky and managed to wangle the night off."

IS THERE no limit to the boastfulness of the *Sunday Telegraph*? On 16 May a report from Benjamin Joffe-Walt on genocide in western Sudan was triumphantly billed as "the first British dispatch from a journalist inside Darfur".

Well, not quite. On 24 April its sister paper the *Daily Telegraph* carried a report on Sudanese ethnic cleansing from Adrian Blomfield in Darfur, followed on 3 May with a 3,000-word dispatch from Irvine Welsh in Darfur. Meanwhile, the *Observer* of 25 April had a report from Julie Flint in Darfur, and on 9 May the *Sunday Times* printed a piece from Ishbel Matheson in Darfur.

Still, no doubt the refugees fleeing Sudan will be consoled with the knowledge that their suffering has at least provided an excuse for one-upmanship – and bogus one-upmanship at that – from the *Sunday Telegraph*.

"TOBAGO is sweet, small, and safe enough to let the pre-teens roam free," claimed the *Times*' travel section on 15 May, in a feature which declared that "adventurous holidays are no longer just for grown-ups".

Just what sort of adventures youngsters could expect was made clear in a news item elsewhere in the supplement.

"Two British tourists and five other women have been raped on the small Caribbean island of Tobago in the last month... the Foreign Office this week issued new travel advice for the island: there has been a recent spate of serious robberies against tourists. Some of the incidents have been accompanied by violence, including rape, against foreign nationals."

IN THE TEAROOM

EVERY TIME there's the faintest possibility the prime minister is on the way out, another "stop-Gordon" candidate is thrown up by anxious Blairites. Over the years the flags of Byers, Milburn, Blunkett and, more recently, Charles Clarke have been run up the flagpole. But few colleagues saluted.

Last week the baton was passed to the health secretary, John Reid. Yes, he'd lambasted Brown's supporters during a cabinet meeting, accusing them of reckless rumour-mongering about an imminent succession. And yes, he has been in the tearoom offering an unusual amount of face-time to wild and unknown backbenchers. But can a seasoned old pro like Reid really believe he'd have a prayer against the chancellor in a leadership contest? Of course not.

Failing a dramatic end run from Peter Hain, Gordon – whatever John Prescott may say – can expect a coronation. Most likely the health secretary is putting down a marker for the eventually-to-become-vacant position of deputy leader. That one truly is contestable. Depending which game of fantasy cabinet you tune in to in the tearoom, it's likely to be filled by Robin Cook, Jack Straw, David Blunkett or, now, the feisty Dr Reid.

But the position may become vacant somewhat sooner than expected. After the pasting Labour's expected to take at the local and European elections will come the cathartic summer reshuffle. If you were Tony Blair, whom would you sack? How about the guy careless enough to be seen with Gordon Brown in the car park of a Scottish oyster bar?

He's the one who then went on to talk to the *Times* about cabinet ministers repositioning themselves as the tectonic plates shifted. The one who's strutting around like a kingmaker, talking about having a "different perspective" on the prime minister's situation, claiming that the issues are more "personalized" than people realize. If Prescott continues to behave so recklessly, the coming reshuffle could get more personalized than the "kingmaker" would like.

'Quintus Slide'

IS Labour chief whip Hilary Armstrong losing her grip? Having denied claims in the *Daily Telegraph* that her backbench rebels risk being deselected before the general election, attempts are now being made to force recalcitrant MPs back into line by claiming that some members of the awkward squad are "lazy".

This line of attack is deemed more likely to succeed since local constituency parties tend to applaud those MPs who specialise in rebelling against unpopular government policies.

The latest in the firing line is the stakhavonite Alice Mahon; but the accusation that she is not pulling her weight has produced guffaws among friends and foes alike. The Halifax MP is in any event due to retire at the next election.

Also in the firing line is the Eurosceptic Hornchurch MP John Cryer – although in his case it is party officials who are exerting the squeeze. Cryer's Hornchurch seat is one of Labour's key marginals in London – not that this has any influence on the "new" Labour kamikaze squad. They have just curtly informed officials of the USDAW shopworkers union that "on no account, should members assist him [Cryer] in the forthcoming general election".

"SCHOOLS and hospitals first" was the Dear Leader's slogan in the run-up to the last general election. So how are the health needs of his own constituents being met in Sedgefield?

Alas not well, says an embarrassing report from the Easington primary care trust (PCT). The north-east of England is already one of the most deprived regions in the country; but the old mining district of Easington, which includes part of Tony Blair's constituency, is the most deprived in that region.

Not only does it come sixth in the English "indices of multiple deprivation", published on 28 April by the office of the deputy prime minister, but local authority leaders have complained that Easington PCT will be underfunded by £78m over the next three years.

And which wards are suffering some of the worst ill-health indices of anywhere in the country? According to the Easington PCT they are Wingate, Wheatley Hill, Thornley, Deaf Hill and Hutton Henry – all in the Dear Leader's Sedgefield constituency.

BEFORE Michael Howard wrote in the *Independent* that Tony Blair should "put Britain's interests first" when it came to dealing with the Americans over Iraq, the Tory leader had schmoozed the editorial suites of various newspapers promoting his new-found view of the "special relationship".

None of this impressed some of the more heavyweight Tories, including Kenneth Clarke, Douglas Hurd and Malcolm Rifkind, all of whom had argued against the invasion of Iraq only to be pooh-poohed by colleagues, including, er, Michael Howard!

RED faces in Reading as Labour hopeful Tony Page and the leader and deputy leader of the local council, David Sutton and Jo Lovelock, were pictured holding a campaign banner which read "Your [sic] better off with Labour".

And even redder faces at party HQ when it was discovered that Cllr Sutton is the proud recipient of the Royal Society of Literature's Benson Award, an award once held by, among others, JRR Tolkien and EM Foster. The trio has since pointed out that they were holding a blank card and the words were "later added by designers".

None of this has passed Jane Griffiths, the de-selected Reading East MP, by. Griffiths' enforced departure as Labour candidate – she was replaced by former lobbyist Tony Page – took place after a protracted and bitter deselection battle, which she claimed was as a result of a dirty tricks campaign part orchestrated by her Reading West neighbour, Labour MP Martin Salter.

Now Griffiths has written to parliamentary colleagues with a copy of the offending banner, which she claims was produced by local PR company Public Impact. "Many of you may have been approached with a view to your using a Reading based company, Public Impact, to produce your literature and newsletters," she writes. "I know that the Reading West MP, Martin Salter, a founder director of that company has worked to help the company gain clients in the PLP in recent years. I just thought you might find it interesting to see the local media coverage a recent Public Impact leaflet has generated."

How very helpful!

Those Anti-Terrorism Messages

Citizens threatened with dirty bomb attack | **MPs threatened with purple cornflour**

IT'S no surprise that the home office has had to delay next month's launch of the national offender management service (NOMS), a prison and probation services hybrid.

It has been deferred until September; but critics say that with no business plan or sensible structure that too will be premature.

MPs who have tabled record numbers of parliamentary questions to find out how the new system was going to operate were increasingly annoyed at home office attempts to fob them off with assurances that all would be made clear when it published its "organogram" – Whitehall jargon for management structure.

The organogram eventually appeared in last week's home office news sheet (ingeniously titled "Metamorphosis – towards a national offender management service") which aims to keep staff up to speed with NOMS' obvious lack of progress. The newsletter was so embarrassing that Martin Narey, NOMS chief executive, has axed it.

The organogram, which sees the demise of probation officers and the rise of offender managers (OMs), also introduces NOMs (national offender managers), ROMs (regional offender managers) and even a DIPSI (director of public sector interventions) which has had staff guffawing about Lala land.

Smart money suggests that even with the delayed launch, NOMS' chances of success are little better that those of Cafcass, the Criminal Records Bureau, the Passport Agency, or (*That's enough home office cock-ups. Ed*).

ROAD RAGE

THE rising cost of crude oil has triggered the usual moans from truckers who want yet more help to shore up their profits.

They're pressing chancellor Gordon Brown to cancel September's increase in fuel-duty, announced in the last budget. That increase would be just 0.5p per litre above inflation, but the Freight Transport Association says some trucking firms may go out of business because of rising costs.

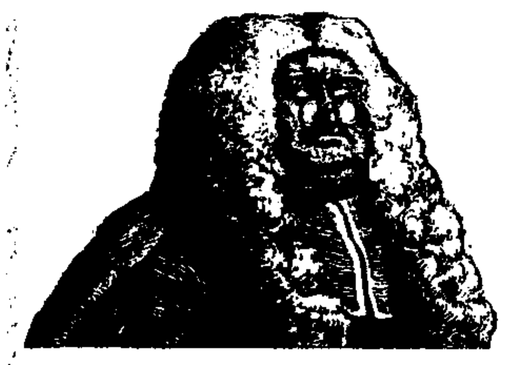
Keeping private companies afloat and protecting them from fluctuating global markets are not normally considered valid uses of public money. But for decades road haulage has been treated as a major exception and "new" Labour still remembers the humiliating fuel protests of 2000.

The FTA knows that truckers – many of whom break the law – don't command huge public sympathy, so it also appeals to the public's greed. Chief executive Richard Turner warned: "At present 10 percent of the price of every product bought in a supermarket is the costs of the transport to get it there. If fuel prices rise by 10p per litre, this will put transport costs up by 5 percent and, on average, will up the cost of everything we buy in the shops by half a percent."

One reason Tesco, Asda et al are so successful is that they don't have to pay for the full environmental costs of trucking, eg for the road damage and pollution caused by fleets of lorries (*Eyes passim*). Cheap transport enables the supermarkets to shift goods as basic as eggs and milk over great distances yet still sell them for less than local shops charge for local eggs and milk. That makes supermarkets a little more susceptible to increases in fuel costs (as well as major contributors to air and noise pollution and traffic congestion) but empowers them to play off producers in one area against producers hundreds of miles away.

If Brown goes ahead with his fuel-duty increase, supermarkets will absorb any minor cost rises that result, such as by nailing down suppliers even harder. The so-called price war, involving discounts on prominent brands, will continue unchanged. But, in theory at least, the increasing cost of fuel could amount to a tiny bit of help for producers selling through small shops and market stalls, where transport is a lower proportion of overall costs.

'Hedgehog'



In The Courts

MUCH murmuring in legal circles over the conduct of Judge Richard Seymour, whose judgments in the technology and construction court (and elsewhere) continue to keep the court of appeal busy.

In the last two years permission has been given to appeal against 15 of the quixotic QC's judgments. Of those, nine have been overturned – a 60 percent failure rate that is more than twice the average.

Nor are Seymour's decisions being overturned on mere technicalities. "The judge's view makes no commercial sense whatsoever," the appeal court decided recently while overturning Seymour's ruling in a case between the Co-Op and technology company ICL. It ordered a retrial and concluded that the judge had "demonstrated an inability to grapple objectively with the issues of fact and law presented to him".

In recent months the appeal court has called other Seymour decisions "entirely wrong" and "obviously unfair". And it has highlighted his propensity for taking a sudden and vicious dislike to lawyers and witnesses. In the Co-Op case, for example, Seymour laid into Co-Op's solicitors DLA and counsel Richard Mawrey QC, questioning whether they had performed "any real legal analysis" and calling their case "bordering on the nonsensical".

Both solicitors and counsel were sacked following the rulings. But Mawrey clawed back the second seat for the appeal – where it was concluded that Seymour's comments had been "wounding and sarcastic… informed by the same unfair view which the judge took of CWS's [the Co-op's] case".

Overturning Seymour's decision in a case between the Royal Brompton Hospital and a variety of contractors, the appeal court found the judge's rulings were wrong for no fewer than six reasons, including that "he never considered… what might arise during the trial", not to mention misunderstanding evidence, failing to apply the correct standard of proof and incorrectly moving to judgment before trial. "I can see no justification for the approach adopted by the judge," wrote one perplexed appeal court sage.

Seymour's other quixotic decisions include throwing out a £800,000 claim because, two weeks previously, one side had faxed two documents to the other after an agreed deadline had passed. One was 10 minutes late, the other 20. The judge's decision "was a flawed one", wrote the appeal judges, "and cannot be allowed to stand".

Seymour also sat as a judge in the Queen's Bench Division when he wasn't supposed to. In this capacity he awarded just £2 damages to a man who claimed he had been made spitefully bankrupt by Customs & Excise. This was one of those rare cases where Seymour was upheld. The ruling was allowed to stand on the innovative basis that under the European convention on human rights, it didn't really matter because everyone thought he was a high court judge at the time.

Perhaps Seymour's most extraordinary ruling, however, involved a man who was stabbed through the spine and left paralysed for life by a crazed nightclub bouncer. Seymour accepted that Stephen Cranston, the bouncer, stabbed David Mattis at Flamingos Nightclub and severed his spinal cord. Nor was it disputed that Flamingos had had plenty of advance warning that Cranston was violent and dangerous. However, Seymour felt able to find in favour of Flamingos because its man Cranston had interrupted his attack to go home and get his knife.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THERE is mounting concern that new legislation being steered through the European Union under the Irish presidency of the EU could scupper Europe's software industry – to the delight of US-owned multinationals like Microsoft and lawyers specialising in patent law.

Last week MEPs led a protest outside the Brussels offices of the Irish diplomats. They were furious that limitations they thought had been placed by the European parliament on the new directive on the patenting of computer software have all but been erased by a "compromise" suggested by the Irish presidency.

The problem with software patents granted by US and EU patent offices is that they are so basic, covering ideas and methods rather than physical inventions, that other software unavoidably infringes them.

This is no problem for the major players because they cross-license their huge patent pools with other big companies ("don't sue us and we won't sue you"). But small companies and individual software developers are excluded from this expensive game.

The MEPs, having listened to leading European economists and academics, had sought to limit what could be patented. But careful reading of the Irish working document suggests pretty well unlimited patenting and unlimited enforceability will be permitted. Europe's small and medium-sized software businesses could be completely stitched up by the bigger corporations.

Does Ireland's cleverly drawn up "compromise" have anything to do with the fact that the Irish presidency of the EU under Taoiseach Bertie Ahearn is sponsored by, among others, Microsoft? Some MEPs believe there should be an inquiry.

FOLLOWING the exposure of British MEPs who signed in and signed out of the European parliament to pocket £170 for their efforts, the Austrian MEP who exposed the practice is suffering the fall-out.

Austrian MEP Hans-Peter Martin, a former journalist who secretly filmed scores of MEPs carrying out this legitimate though morally dubious practice, is now being threatened with legal action by German MEPs. They've told him that if he mutters another word about them, they'll sting him for 250,000 euros.

MEANWHILE, across the road from the parliament there's a crisis at the commission where no one wants to take over Romano Prodi's job as president this November.

Tony Blair is expected to veto the appointment of Belgium's prime minister Guy Verhofstadt – "a Belgian bloke no one's ever heard of", according to the *Sun*. And in a move that recalls the appointment of Luxembourg's Jacques Santer in 1994, the current favourite is the grand duchy's obscure PM, Jean-Claude Juncker. "If no one else will do it, I will," he said big-heartedly.

Chris Patten's recent comments about doing the job himself can be dismissed: the French have already told insiders in Brussels they will veto it. "His French is hopeless," one said.

That may be true, but at least his grasp of EU affairs is better than that of French defence minister Michelle Alliot-Marie. Speaking last month during a European Council meeting about a new agreement with non-EU countries, journalists pushed her to be more precise. "Turkey and Finland," she said. Her political advisers hung their heads in shame. Finland joined the EU in 1995.

DOWN ON THE FARM

THE golden rule about almost everything the European Union gets up to is to distinguish between theory and practice. The theory almost invariably sounds fine… but then comes the practice.

Reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) is no exception. The theory behind it was to separate (or "decouple") the £30bn a year which EU taxpayers spend on subsidising food production, and pay it instead to farmers to look after the countryside in an environmentally acceptable way. No longer will farmers be paid to create grain, beef and butter mountains. Instead they will receive a "single farm payment" to cover land they farm. Whether or not they produce anything doesn't matter, so long as they keep it nice 'n' tidy and look after their animals and wildlife.

Crazily, in the UK Defra has decided to devise no fewer than three separate systems to determine how much that single farm payment should be. Hence farmers in Scotland and Wales, lowland England and upland England will receive widely different subsidies even if they compete in the same market.

Defra has also decided to exclude the owners of fruit orchards from any subsidy at all, so that by the end of this year, if a cider grower hasn't rooted up all his apple trees, his land will never receive any farm subsidy again.

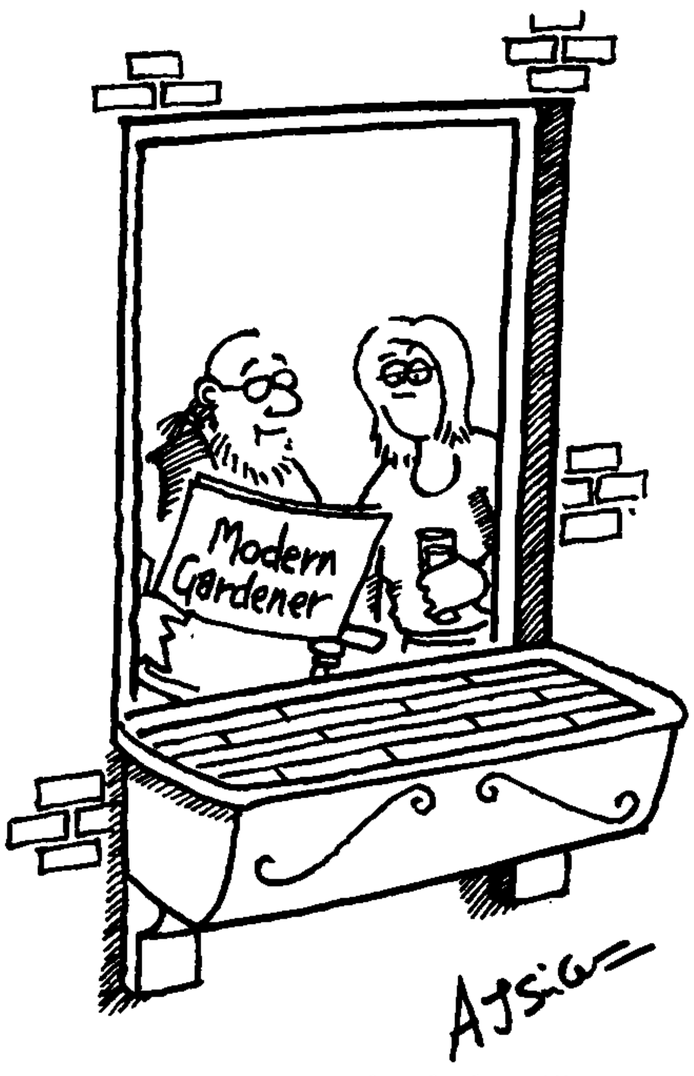
A third twist of the knife which farmers are now waking up to, is a delightful trick called "cross-compliance". Farmers will only receive their subsidy if they can prove that they meet "statutory management requirements". This means they must comply with 18 EU directives, some already in force, others to be phased in over the next three years, covering everything from the wild birds and habitats directives to those governing sewage sludge, nitrates, groundwater, animal ID and cattle ID, not to mention the notorious "eartags, registers and passports regulation".

To prove compliance farmers face mountains of extra paperwork, which even Defra conservatively estimates will cost the average farmer £1,000 a year. And the need to police this new system will require an army of new inspectors, with the right to come into a farm at any time to go through the piles of paper with a fine-tooth comb.

If inspectors discover any infringements, the farmer can be "fined" by losing all his subsidies. But the really clever twist is that only 75 percent of the money "saved" in this way will go back to Brussels. The rest will stay with the national authorities who spot the mistake. Thus officials will have a financial incentive to discover as many infringements as possible.

No prize for guessing which EU government will top the league table for catching its farmers out most often.

'Muckspreader'



"I've gone for decking!"

TV

Hell's Kitchen (ITV1/ITV2)

THE joke that television is described as a "medium" because it's usually neither rare nor well-done is an old one but it calls out to be revived for a reality TV show set in a restaurant. The show gives a few weeks culinary training to 10 minor celebs before filming them live for two weeks as they work in Claridge's kitchen. Bad-egg contestants will be binned until one scoops the pot.

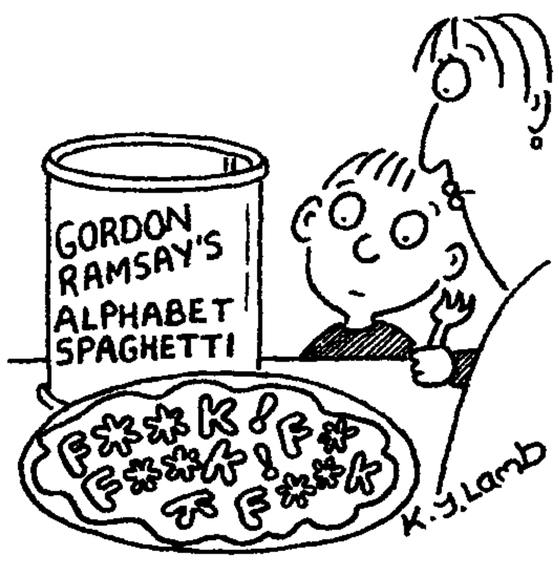
This is clearly an attempt to cross reality competition shows with cookery programmes – a sort of *Big Broth* – although the strange thing is that ITV1 is the channel least dependent on celebrity chefs. **Hell's Kitchen** is more like a format for BBC2 or Channel 4 and feels unlikely to be a big ratings-winner. The only explanation is that ITV1 is hoping to attract upmarket foodie viewers in the hope of attracting top-end advertisers. The show is sponsored by Tio Pepe.

Another oddity about the project is that it makes a celebrity of the judge. This has happened in *Pop Idol*, with the regrettable rise of Simon Cowell; but, in the classic confinement contest format, the emphasis is entirely on the contestants, with the exception of a presenter who merely links the action.

Here, Gordon Ramsay, hardly a rare sight on the box after his just-finished Channel 4 series *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, claims around 60 percent of the air-time with his increasingly familiar repertoire of foul-mouthed comments and put-downs.

"I'm not worried. I'm shitting myself," he tells the camera as the project begins, which is ridiculously over-dramatic as (unlike Jamie Oliver in the far more serious *Jamie's Kitchen*) he stands to lose nothing personally in either money or reputation if the minor showbiz figures cock it up on his watch. As in his C4 series, Ramsay comes across as an unpleasant bully, shrieking at women competitors: "You laugh now, love, and I'll stick your arse on that chargrill."

Unfortunately for Angus Deayton, here finally swapping helpings of humble pie for Ramsay's scallop risotto to begin a new ITV career, the need to find screen-time for both Ramsay and the trainees



leaves him a peripheral figure, making uneasy quips about meals he's had in the past.

But perhaps they have foregrounded Ramsay so much because the contestants are a sorry lot. You suspect that *Hell's Kitchen* was designed as a way of luring some of those celebs who found the idea of *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!* too cruel or humiliating. Cooking beef wellington in Claridge's and living in a posh flat is much more appetising than crunching grubs and insects in a rainforest camp.

Yet, oddly, while the most recent series of *I'm A Celebrity* had genuine celebrities, the gentler entry level here has lured a mainly C-list crew. There's one real star – Pub Landlord comic Al Murray – but otherwise the competing chefs included two people who used to be on TV but haven't been for a while (Edwina Currie, Roger Cook) plus John Leslie's ex-girlfriend Abi Titmuss, suspended athlete Dwain Chambers and various minor actors or singers.

On the first night, the burly Roger Cook fell through a chair in the competitors' flat and had to pull out with a shattered knee. Deayton excitedly joked that "people are already talking about the curse of Hell's Kitchen" – although curiously he didn't mention that the show had begun on Sunday night in near-disaster when ITV1 played the wrong tape: a trailer for a gardening series which had to be interrupted.

The opening hour showed there's a real problem with the format. While *Big Brother* and *I'm A Celebrity* are carefully set up to have long periods of contestant reflection and bitching between sudden rapid challenges, *Hell's Kitchen* consists of almost continuous frenzy in the kitchen, whipped by a screaming Ramsay, which allows almost no room for interaction. Nor is there any real sense of jeopardy. *I'm A Celebrity* demands genuine if pointless bravery but there's no humiliation in proving unable to cook to Michelin levels.

ITV is going very big on this. There will be daily update segments in the coffee-break show *This Morning* and frequent bolt-on coverage on ITV1. But it's hard to see the idea ever having the legs the network is asking from it and could well be a curse for all concerned.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

HUGE sighs of relief at the BBC following news that the board of governors had done exactly what it was told and "unanimously" selected chairman Michael Grade's choice of Mark Thompson as director-general.

The reason for all the Heep-like grovelling? The governors know that in secret Grade would like to see the back of most of them — especially Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, who shafted Greg Dyke and who will pay when Dyke's memoirs finally come out.

But what of Thompson's credentials? While at Channel 4 he promised to deliver programmes that would fill a "creative deficit" in our television. Hence no doubt such triumphs as *How Clean Is Your House?*, *Selling Houses*, *Flashers Uncovered* and *10 Years Younger* in which a "style consultant" slaps make up on a middle-aged volunteer. Public service broadcasting at its best!

MUCH embarrassment at the BBC's children's department after a dressing-down from Ofcom, the Über-watchdog with responsibility for broadcasting standards.

Last week the watchdog announced a "serious error and contravention of the standards code of guidance" in a February episode of children's programme *Stitch Up*, a junior *Candid Camera*-type affair in which a group of Greek tourists were tricked into acting out a horror movie.

Unfortunately this involved one of them shouting out a phrase which Ofcom translated as "I'm going to fuck your virginal mother" – a "serious error" which the watchdog said contravened its code. The only excuse the BBC was able to offer was that it had "taken advice from a Greek speaker" but "she did not recognise the words used." Expect a BBC job ad in *Media Guardian* for a foul-mouthed Greek any day now…

WHEN BBC News 24 went live to Chris Eakin in Glasgow for the latest on the explosion at a plastics factory, the hack wasn't giving much away.

"It would be sheer speculation to say that these firefighters are communicating with any survivors. I have no more information than any of the people watching these pictures," he revealed.

Half an hour later he was live on screen again reporting that: "There really hasn't been any news to report for some hours now."

DUMB BRITAIN

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Steve Wright: What does a fletcher make?
Contestant: Curtains.
Wright: A sapling is a young what?
Contestant: Pig.

The Vault, ITV

Melanie Sykes: What is a mixture of avocado, chili and lime juice commonly known as?
Contestant: Guatemala.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What name is given to the field of medicine that concerns the health of women?
Contestant: Womenology.
Robinson: Which Roman statesman gave his name to the month of July?
Contestant: Augustus.

LONG-SUFFERING viewers of regional television news often have to watch the same story covered nationally and then by their own regional hacks. But BBC South has gone one better.

Based in Southampton, BBC South has to cover Oxfordshire so Oxford's local "news" comes from a separate office in Oxford. Thus viewers in the Oxford area who had to endure a package from Brighton about their forthcoming "big game" against Swindon (interviews with players and manager) then faced another package from Swindon about their forthcoming "big game" against Brighton (yet more interviews with players and manager).

THE "One BBC initiative", designed to make BBC hacks feel more included, has suffered a setback.

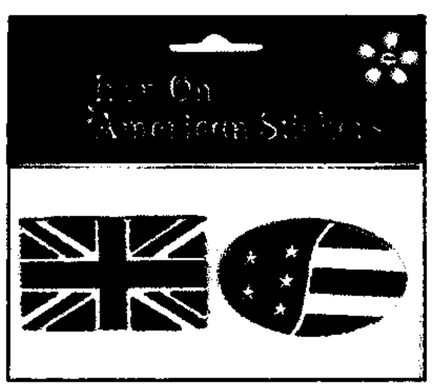
The recent opening ceremony for the White City "Media Village", presented by Jonathan Ross before an invited audience of "opinion formers", was closed to, er, BBC staff. They had to wait for their own ceremony later.

Warballs

"I started writing [the book] eight months after 11 September… my true response was to try to find the good things in life. It was my personal cheer-myself-up project. But I had a really good feeling about it. You know when you hit it on the head, know what I mean?" — Plum Sykes, explaining to the *Financial Times* why she wrote *Bergdorf Blondes*.

"If two of the largest manmade structures ever constructed can be destroyed in a matter of hours, then what does that say about the other supposed constants in our lives? Richard Dedomenici's sculpture 'WTJ' is a scale model of the World Trade Centre assembled from 198 wooden Jenga blocks, individually hand coloured with a marker pen." — Explanatory material for Dedomenici's sculpture "WTJ".

"Who were the ancient Spartans, and why should we care? The events of 11 September 2001 jolted many of us into rethinking…" — *The Spartans: An Epic History* by Paul Cartledge.



— Packet of "American stickers" on sale in the US.

HARSH WORDS

Continuing the Eye's occasional series devoted to the new callousness...

"The furore over the Iraq war, which has already claimed the scalps of the BBC chairman and director-general, yesterday brought down a national newspaper editor."

— The Daily Mail *gets to the heart of the matter on the day the coalition death toll in Iraq rises to 898, and the Iraq Body Count organization estimates that at least 9,000 Iraqi citizens have now perished.*

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

ABC News Radio (motto: "It matters where you get your news") was busy reporting "atrocities in Iraqi prisons" when news of the beheading of American captive Nick Berg by a group linked with al Qaeda emerged from Iraq.

Within minutes the American station's "atrocities" had turned into "abuses in the Iraqi prisons" and within the hour, the same "abuses" were downgraded again to become evidence of "unprofessionalism in the Iraqi prison" – note the use of the singular rather than the plural.

MUSEUM NEWS

AT AN acrimonious meeting two weeks ago, staff at the Natural History Museum vented their fury with Professor Sir Keith O'Nions, chairman of the museum's trustees. As one observed afterwards, O'Nions "is a complete pillock".

O'Nions, who is also chief scientific adviser to the ministry of defence, recently became so fixated on alleged accounting discrepancies (of somewhere between £10,000 and £20,000) that he hired PricewaterhouseCoopers to investigate.

The sleuths secretly copied the hard disc drives from many staff computers, including that of outgoing director Sir Neil Chalmers himself, even though neither he nor most of the other victims were under suspicion. As several of the museum's most senior keepers said in a letter of protest, this behaviour was "of questionable legality" and "significantly enhanced the level of fear and mistrust".

PWC also hired a helicopter to fly over the homes of the three staff under investigation and photograph them, apparently in the hope of showing that they were living beyond their means. The suspects were fully exonerated, but the final bill for the investigation came to more than £400,000.

A museum spokesman has described the inquiry merely as "a review of best practice". So: £400,000 spent fruitlessly chasing £20,000, at a time when the museum is having trouble paying staff anyway. It's hard to get better practice than that.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Food is the new rock 'n' roll." — *Watching the English* by Kate Fox, p.296.

"Food… is the new sex." — *Watching the English* by Kate Fox, p.306.

"Carbohydrates are the new fat." — *Watching the English* by Kate Fox, p.308.

"Homocysteine is the new cholesterol." — *Watching the English* by Kate Fox, p.308.

"Bricks have become the new gold." — Anthony Howard, BBC World Service.

"Wood is the new grass." — *What's New in Building.*

"Darwinism is the new Marxism." — Anthony Daniels, *Sunday Telegraph.*

"Banking is the new law." — *eFinancial News.*

"Accountancy is the new black." — Accountancy magazine *PQ.*

AD NAUSEAM

OFCOM's proposal to transfer regulation of all types of advertising to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) means, subject to government approval, that from November all advertising – from TV to press, to posters and pop-ups – will be self-regulated.

The industry is chuffed to bits at the prospect because, as this column has long bemoaned, self-regulation under the ASA allows advertisers to run ads unimpeded and then, once the complaints have come in, remove them. This plays into the hands of the more "creative" advertisers who willingly flout the codes to get headlines – just the kind of free publicity clients relish, as French Connection will testify. By contrast, all TV advertising currently has to be pre-approved *before* it can be aired.

The argument proffered by the industry and Ofcom is that having a one-stop shop will make it easier for consumers to complain. What they don't say is that without pre-vetting there will be much more to complain about.

The responses to the Ofcom consultation document that led to these proposals make intriguing reading. Most of them, not surprisingly, came from advertisers and their agencies. Diageo and British Gas are both quoted as saying that they were right behind the self-regulation. No surprise there: in the last 12 months both have fallen foul of the ASA's codes and had complaints upheld against their advertising. But the toughest sentence meted out by the ASA to either has been to "ask them not to use the posters again".

AS EURO 2004 approaches, ITV has nearly finalised which brands will be allocated the premium ad spots in the big games.

The brands to be connected with this festival of sporting prowess are Ford, Carlsberg, Carling, WKD, Hyundai, Guinness, Vauxhall, Renault and Nike. Or cars, booze, booze, booze, cars, booze, cars, cars… sport.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

KABBALAH IS SOOOO IN!!!
KABBALAH CENTRE
KABBALAH IS ALL ABOUT LOOKING INSIDE AND REACHING DEEP WITHIN...
COX RELIGIOUS LEADER
"I'M TRYING I'M TRYING- I CAN'T FIND MY CHEQUEBOOK ANYWHERE!!!
KEEP SEARCHING DEEP WITHIN THE HANDBAG LUV!!!

SIGNAL FAILURES

THE government's rail review has turned into a scramble for more power by the many different parties involved – including the government.

"New" Labour wants to grab more control over the industry while refusing to take responsibility for it. Transport secretary Alistair Darling has listened politely to various people trying to convince him they should have more power, but his main interest lies in increasing his own say. So Kim Howells, his arm's-length minister, has said it's "insane" that a regulator rather than the government decides how much is spent on rail. (Actually the government sets the context for regulatory decisions and the regulator has no say in train-franchise subsidies, but Howells clearly had a point to make.)

In seven years "new" Labour hasn't changed that "insane" situation because it wants to keep rail borrowing off its books. It insists Network Rail is a private company, despite NR being established and guaranteed by the state and dependent on public funding. With private companies' fortunes riding on NR's performance, an independent regulator is unavoidable so long as NR is officially a private company. The government has promised the city as much, to ensure the rail industry could borrow private cash, so Howells' idea of scrapping the regulator's role would be difficult and costly.

If "new" Labour is serious about regaining direct control of rail spending, it has to admit NR is a public company and accept some responsibility for NR's borrowing and performance. A regulator would still be needed to ensure fair play for train operators (mainly freight companies) not contracted by the state.

Supporters of today's industry structure point to decades of stop-go funding when governments dictated rail spending. More than 10 years ago we were told privatisation would replace the treasury's dead hand with long-term planning. But that was before Railtrack couldn't keep the pledges in its annual network statements, upgrades of the Great Western and east-coast mainlines were ditched and projects like Thameslink 2000 and extending the east London line were trapped by indecision and rising costs. Train franchises have bumped along from month to month while the state promised to make good any losses; even the recently planned 20-year South West Trains franchise was cut to three years, with new trains already on order diverted elsewhere.

British Rail often had to work to five-year plans, determined by the period until the next election. That was too short, given the time it takes to upgrade a mainline or procure new trains (designed to last more than 30 years). But with "new" Labour considering rail funding afresh at each three-yearly comprehensive spending review, the railway now works to three-year political horizons. The private-sector element is even more myopic, focused on the need to show profit in each year's results.

The solution isn't another horrendously complex "matrix" of contracts, interfaces and conflicting goals, overseen by armies of bureaucrats and consultants, but for the treasury to grow up. Swiss railways, probably Europe's best, are nationalised and the Swiss government commits to 15-year investment programmes, which it sticks to through thick and thin. Contrast that with Britain's 10-year transport plan, published in summer 2000 and already in tatters.

PS: One result of short-termism post privatisation is the absence of any significant electrification schemes on main or commuter lines. BR had a rolling programme of electrification, despite the treasury's influence, because it demonstrated the long-term benefits of the investment. Recent increases in oil prices will add to the operating costs of a railway incapable of seeing the benefits of independence from the volatile global oil market.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

Payment by results

SHORTLY after health secretary John "Oh fuck, not health" Reid took up his post, he was accosted by civil servants desperate to explain how "payment by results" (PBR) would revolutionise the NHS. An hour later he admitted he "didn't understand a word". A year later, and Reid may know what it means; but as with the rest of his reforms, he has no idea if it'll work.

Superficially PBR sounds simple enough: you pay providers a fixed price for any given treatment. Those who traditionally charge more than this tariff have to cut their costs, those who charge less make a profit.

Hospitals still have to compete for the business of the primary care trusts (PCTs), but on the basis of quality rather than cost. In theory, a hospital that provides better quality care (eg demonstrable safety record, clean wards) and can throw in a few extras (eg free transport) should take business away from its neighbour, which may then go bust (unless it happens to be in a Labour constituency in election year, in which case it will be bailed out by the treasury).

PBR has the potential to drive up quality, increase activity and keep costs down, but there are a number of reasons why it could all go pear-shaped....

- The time frame is absurdly ambitious. By 2008, the vast majority of a hospital's income will supposedly depend on PBR, covering all accident and emergency cases, critical care, inpatient and outpatient care. In America, where PBR runs on a less grand scale, the largest hospital department is dedicated to income generation and coding. To ensure correct payment, every case has to be correctly coded by breaking it up into a number of "healthcare resource groups" (HRGs), to ensure that even the most complex treatment is adequately rewarded.

This is complex. For example, the HRG for coronary bypass amalgamates 52 types of procedure and the potential for coding error is huge. Yet the NHS is already well know for gross inaccuracies in its data collection: when the audit commission did spot checks on data quality in 55 trusts last year, 17 got the lowest (one star) rating. PBR is also critically dependent on the support of clinical staff and the success of the equally error-prone NHS IT programme. The resignation of Professor Peter Hutton from the IT advisory board because of staff disaffection does not bode well.

Purchasers too may have difficulty making PBR work. Primary care trusts control 70 percent of the NHS budget and are supposed to strike a hard bargain on behalf of patients. But a recent survey found that only a third of them have dedicated finance directors and only one has a full-time IT director. Unsurprisingly, PCTs have been unable to resist the bullying of the new foundation trusts, who have tied them into long-term contracts before PBR has been properly assessed.

- Foundation trusts have to succeed so "new" Labour has given them unfair advantages. By being able to borrow against capital, they can kick-start new building quicker than other hospitals. And by switching to PBR a year earlier than their competitors, they gain windfall profits to plough back into even better facilities to stuff their neighbours. And if they still screw up, the DoH has set aside a £40m "risk pool" to prevent bankruptcy of the chosen ones.

- The American "Kaiser" model of healthcare that Tony Blair salivates over delivers a better service at equivalent cost to the NHS by investing heavily in community services and ensuring patients get admitted to hospital only as a very last resort. But under PBR there will be a tendency for cash-strapped hospitals to see and admit patients more often than necessary because – just like hugely expensive private medicine – each "episode of care" will attract a fee.

The onus will be on primary care trusts to query the bills and develop more community services to prevent costly admissions, but at present they're just not up to the task. As it stands, payment by results just means payment by activity, with no check on whether the treatment is necessary. According to the national audit office (NAO), last year 71 trusts did not achieve "financial stability" and 51 had "significant debts". With so many hospitals struggling to survive, PBR could be just as competitive, divisive and costly as the Tories' internal market.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

THIS HOSPITAL'S A MAZE – HOW ON EARTH DO YOU FIND YOUR WAY AROUND?
OH, IT'S EASY...
X-RAY – FIRST PAST THE DISUSED DAY CENTRE, SECOND RIGHT AFTER THE SHUT DOWN NEUROLOGY DEPARTMENT...
PAST THE BROKEN LIFTS, ROUND THE CORNER WHERE THE MATERNITY WING USED TO BE, SHARP BY THE CLOSED BY INFECTION INTENSIVE CARE, THROUGH THE ABANDONED EAR, NOSE AND THROAT CLINIC...

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

WHAT A MOCKERY

THE facetious farewell speech, full of in-jokes at the expense of former colleagues, is an established part of office life. And had David Grey, an IT specialist taking an amicably agreed redundancy from Wear Valley district council in County Durham, merely read his out at his leaving do, it's unlikely anyone would have taken offence.

His jibes were pretty mild – about the Labour council's chief executive Ian Phillips being nominated for an "arrogant bar steward" award, and managers having "wasted millions on new computer systems they haven't a clue about". But Grey put his speech on the council's email system so all staff could enjoy it – and the self-important chief executive wasn't happy. Whatever Phillips's pique, however, it hardly justified a chain of events which ended with Grey's home being besieged by armed police.

On Grey's last morning at Wear Valley personnel chief Angela Forster and IT head Phil Errington told him that unless he retracted the comments in the email, his redundancy offer might be withdrawn. Grey, feeling this was out of all proportion, stormed up to Phillips's office, where he told his boss to "f*** off, you bastard", and made a V-sign.

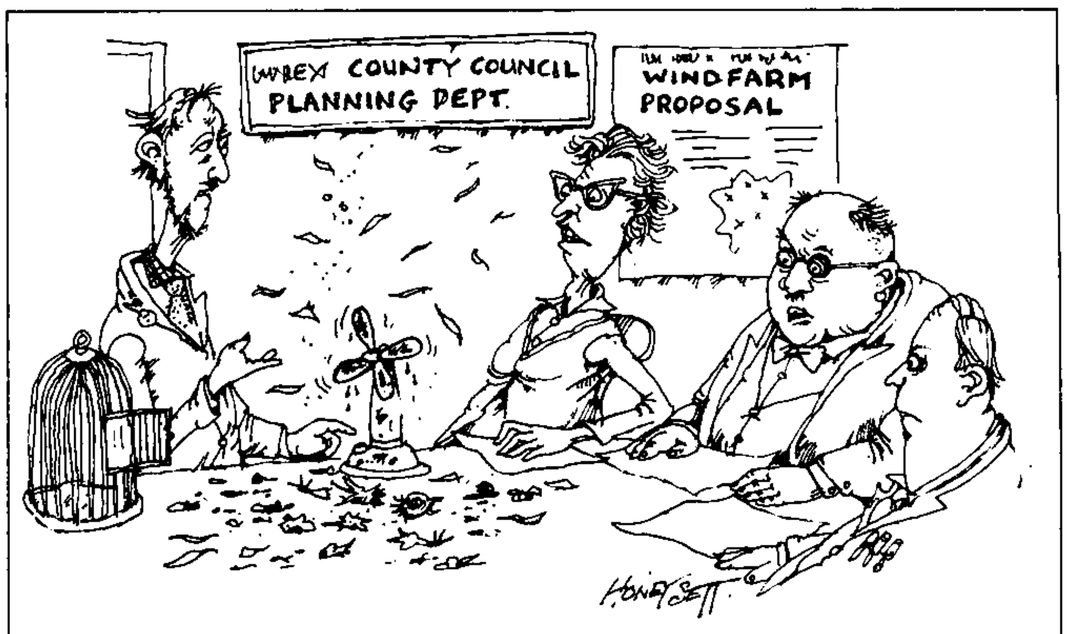
That afternoon Forster and Errington interrupted his leaving do at the Horseshoe pub in Crook and told Grey he was to have his pension cut off, too. Aghast at the prospect of his future being wrecked by such a trivial matter, Grey, 59, told the pair "you want shooting" and said the chief executive "should think himself bloody lucky that [I am] not the kind of person to use a gun".

A pub customer who was not in Grey's party told the *Eye*: "These two suits came in and were intimidating the man. What he said was clearly just a figure of speech, not a threat. The landlady told the suits to leave." Grey left for home shortly afterwards – unaware that, because he had uttered the word "gun", armed police were now "securing" the council offices having been called in by Phillips, who claimed he was in fear of his life.

At 10pm that night Grey's wife Margaret was walking her dog in the dark lane leading to the couple's remote cottage, when she was terrified to find herself surrounded by armed police. Despite her assurances that her husband was calm, sober and absolutely did not possess a gun, Knacker took cover behind a wall and ordered Grey to come out of the house with his hands up. After being made to kneel on the ground with at least three firearms trained on him, he was handcuffed and taken away. He was held at Bishop Auckland police station for 17 hours and told he would be charged with making "threats to kill".

The following afternoon he was released without charge. Two weeks later Phillips wrote to Grey, telling him his redundancy deal and pension were reinstated and thanking him for the nine years of "hard work and commitment" he had given to Wear Valley council. No hard feelings, then!

● THE Corporation of London, local authority for the Square Mile, prides itself on the independence of its councillors, untainted by party politics. New electoral rules this year extended the franchise to all public companies based in the city, with votes allocated according to the number of employees. The idea was to introduce a greater measure of democracy. The result, at elections in March, was 19 contested wards out of 25, unheard of since the war. But how much things had really changed was revealed in the answer to a question from Cllr Brian Mooney, a former Reuters journalist, at the council's first post-election meeting last month. New disclosure rules oblige councillors who are freemasons to reveal their membership. So, asked Mooney, how many masons are on the council? Thirty-four out of 125, came the answer. Hurrah for independence!



"Yes, well, thank you Councillor for the danger to birdlife demonstration"

Council listens to local people on public toilets

Shepway News

OH HAPPY DAI

THE pressure has eased on Ceredigion county council leader Dai Lloyd Evans, following a referendum last week in which residents rejected the idea of having an elected mayor.

The campaign for a referendum followed widespread public opposition to the West Wales council's plans to build 6,500 houses in the countryside – to which the council responded by sanctioning the building of even more. It received 11,000 individual responses – out of a population of just over 70,000 – to its controversial unitary development plan.

In response to the consultation, it now plans to extend the land available for housing in 23 villages, effectively allowing even more homes to be built. In an area reliant on agriculture and tourism, both industries with low wages, virtually all the new houses will be beyond the means of locals. Campaigning group Cymuned (Community) believes the housing boom will lead to more holiday homes and increased emigration by young people.

The plan was approved by councillors last year, although some neglected to declare that they owned land now earmarked for housing development. Among those was "independent" council leader Dai Lloyd Evans, who was found, after a BBC Wales investigation, to own two large fields on the outskirts of Tregaron.

He bought the land a year before the UDP was voted through. The £20,000 fields were estimated by one local estate agent to be worth more than £1m if they were sold as housing plots. Dai Knacker has sent a file on the case to the crown prosecution service. But at least Evans need no longer worry about being sidelined by a mayor.

● WHEN Bexley council wants a job done well, it calls in the experts. Which is why contractor FM Conway got the job of clearing up tons of incinerated waste illegally dumped in a residential street in Bexleyheath, Kent, on 28 April. This was the same FM Conway which in April last year was fined £29,000 by Dartford magistrates after admitting four offences of flytipping huge amounts of demolition rubble on farmland without permission.

BLOSS ON THE LANDSCAPE

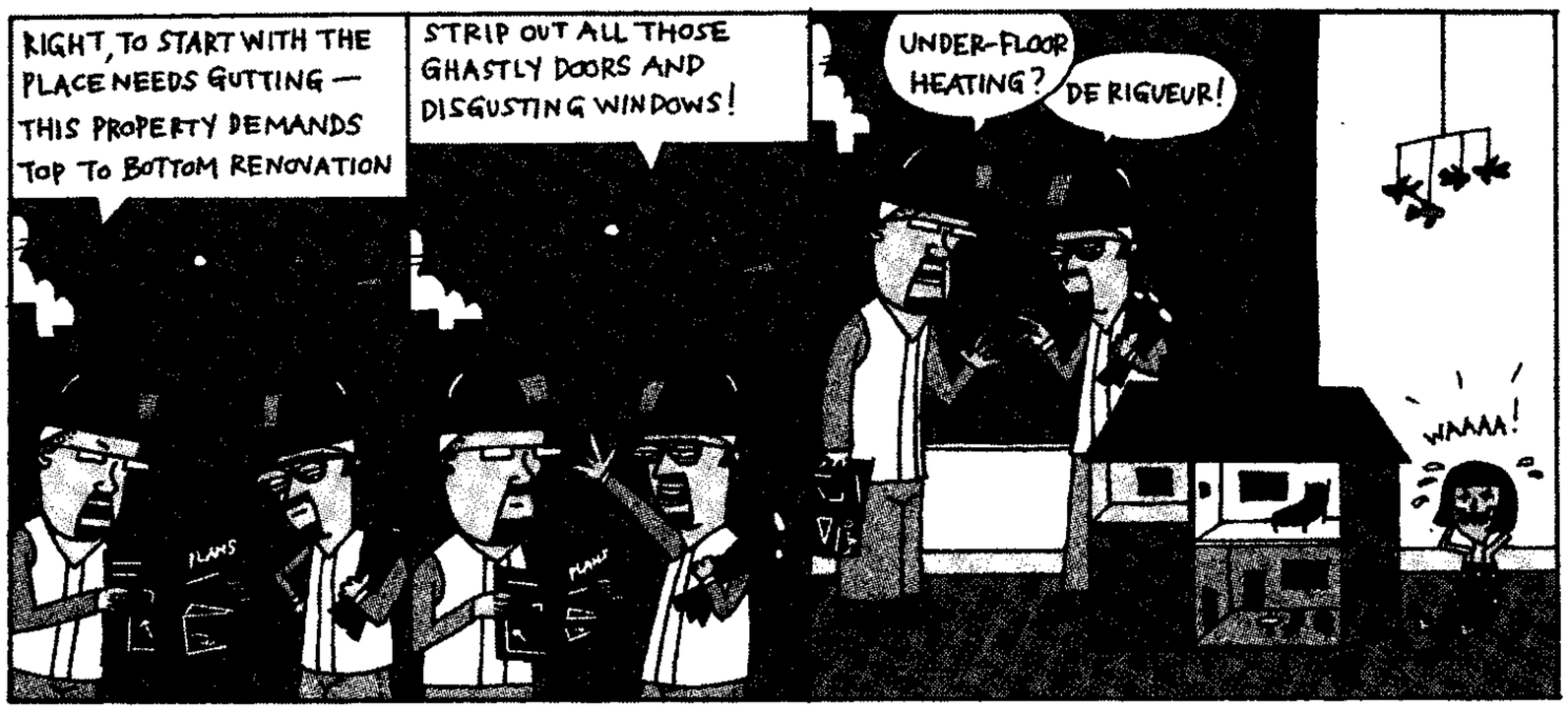
TOWER Hamlets is spending £2.5m trying to persuade 2,000 tenants on five estates in Mile End to agree to a transfer of the management of their homes to a "registered social landlord" called East End Homes.

Housing minister Keith Hill promised a "fair debate" on the issue, but 100 tenants tell the *Eye* the debate hasn't been fair at all. The council wants to transfer the estates, the new landlord wants to transfer the estates and the consultants hired by the council want to transfer the estates. All the propaganda is on one side. Not a penny of public money has been spent on the case for continuing council control – which the 100 tenants want.

By an amazing coincidence, East End Homes is run by Paul Bloss, former acting director of housing at, er, Tower Hamlets council.

● IN THE last *Eye* we reported on how an "antisocial behaviour report" had been issued by community safety wardens employed by Doncaster council after they were subjected to a torrent of verbal abuse in the street by a Labour member of Doncaster council, Tony Corden. After the *Eye* and local papers reported the incident the council acted swiftly to put things right – by suspending the wardens from duty and taking no action whatever against Corden!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


RIGHT, TO START WITH THE PLACE NEEDS GUTTING — THIS PROPERTY DEMANDS TOP TO BOTTOM RENOVATION
STRIP OUT ALL THOSE GHASTLY DOORS AND DISGUSTING WINDOWS!
UNDER-FLOOR HEATING?
DE RIGUEUR!
WAAAA!

HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has put its dotcom university up for sale, after acknowledging that it had recruited just 900 students in 2003.

UK e-University (UKeU) was set up in 2000, using £62m of government funding, to allow overseas students to follow courses at a variety of UK universities via their computers rather than by attending classes. It was touted as the 21st century Open University and HEFCE spent more than £30m to devise the infrastructure.

In March *Computing* magazine revealed that UKeU had failed to meet its first-year target of 5,600 students, recruiting just 900 at a cost of £44,000 each.

Now HEFCE has decided to cut and run and is offering the whole caboodle for sale, saying it wants to hear from buyers interested in "all or any part of" the business or its assets.

NOOKS and CORNERS

OVER the last few years, Mr Hugh Brasher has made four successive planning applications to build on the yard he bought at 77-79 St Margaret's Road, Twickenham, close to the Thames.

The proposal, either made in his own name or that of a Mr C. Holmes, is to build a four-storey block with part-industrial use as a canoe workshop. This has provoked strong opposition from neighbours and local amenity societies, especially as the site is in a conservation area. Three times, therefore, the planning application has been rejected by Richmond-on-Thames borough council. But the fourth application has now met with the approval of Andrew Dillon, the local planning officer. Quite why is not clear, but what is certain is that this case is not just of local interest.

Mr Brasher's yard is the site of the stables of a most remarkable Regency house. Originally called Solus Lodge and built in 1812, it is now called Sandycombe Lodge and stands in Sandycoombe Road. An English Heritage Blue Plaque informs passers-by that the house was the home of J.M.W. Turner until 1826. Indeed, not only did the great painter live in the house but he designed it.

Sandycombe House: rear elevation

Although the wings were later heightened, the building survives remarkably intact. This is largely due to Professor Harold Livermore, who has lived in it since 1947 and who opens the house to interested individuals and groups. Prof Livermore now proposes to leave Sandycombe Lodge as a permanent memorial to Turner and the charities commission has given assent to a scheme to make this studio-house into a study centre and museum. As several of the provisions of Turner's will have notoriously been betrayed, this is a generous gesture to commemorate England's greatest painter.

But Sandycombe Lodge as a Turner Centre will not be enhanced by a four-storey block looming over it, nor by the sound of timber being sanded nor by the smell of glue and varnish. If Richmond council cannot act in the national interest and turn down Mr Brasher's proposal (yet again), the case should be called in by the secretary of state.

Curiously Hugh Brasher is the son of the late Chris Brasher, the Olympic athlete who, in 1997, founded the Petersham Trust to protect the glorious view southwards from Richmond Hill over the Thames valley – a view famously recorded by Turner in a painting which hangs in the Tate.

MORE ON attempts by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority to demolish the unobtrusive but illegal turf-roofed, timber Roundhouse, an "eco-house" created by Tony Wrench and Jane Faith (see Eye 1104).

I'm happy to report that for the moment it still stands. Over Easter demonstrators occupied the Castell Henllys Iron Age fort near Newport in protest at the planning authority's behaviour and Mr Wrench has received much public support. Local magistrates have now decided to refer the case to the high court in Swansea.

Of course Mr Wrench should have obtained planning permission before building his modest rural home (as, presumably, Bob Marshall-Andrews MP did before building his semi-underground beach home designed by Future Systems within the national park which presents huge plate-glass windows towards Druidston Haven).

But any moral authority claimed by the national park is undermined by the fact that it has given planning permission for the part of the Bluestone Holiday Village that lies within its boundaries. This is a private £60m development by Alfred McAlpine near Milford Haven which will consist of 350 holiday chalets imported from Estonia, plus a bogus Celtic-style village of 60 flats.

Although this obtrusive and puerile project contravenes planning policies, the Welsh assembly has declined to intervene – indeed, with its customary concern for environmental and architectural quality, it has coughed up £16.5m towards it. Even so, the Council for National Parks is seeking judicial review of this approval – compared with which the poor little Roundhouse seems a trivial and inoffensive matter. Is there any hope for Wales?

READERS who recall the campaign to save Gilthill primary school, a decent Late Victorian building which was to be replaced by a new structure and car park, will have mixed feelings at the news that the education authority, Nottinghamshire county council, has bowed to local pressure and the building is to be offered for sale.

Obviously this is preferable to demolition, but why sell it? It was built as a school, it works well as a school, and the parents of the children who attend want it to continue as a school. Finding a new use for it is a pointless waste of an asset.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

It's all so dull and political this year–where's the shock element, the sense of fun?
If there's one thing I can't bear, it's serious artists!
TURNER SHORTLIST
BIN LADEN'S HOUSE, AFRICAN AND TURKISH IDENTITY, GEORGE BUSH'S TEXAS.
I mean...
TURNERS

I-SPY *Abuja, Nigeria*

Submitted by A. Thomas. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SENIOR managers at Radio 3 are falling over themselves to deny it, but they're facing what could turn into a serious listeners' revolt.

After four years of what controller Roger Wright calls "exciting new developments" – BBCspeak for stealthy dumbing-down – devotees of what the station *used* to stand for have turned themselves into the Friends of Radio 3. Except they're not so friendly and they're out for scalps – or any bit of Roger Wright they can grab.

When they spotted recently that the BBC's expensively packaged but spectacularly pointless new programme policy had quietly changed the wording of Radio 3's mission statement so that it no longer guarantees to keep classical music "at the heart of the schedules", the Friends rallied the troops and got a fair amount of press attention. Wright's lieutenants snootily pooh-poohed their complaints and an unnamed BBC official was quoted in the *Guardian* dismissing the Friends as an inconsequential group of nobodies. "Who are these friends? There are only about four of them."

Alas, no. The Friends' website, where they run a message-board for Radio 3 malcontents, reveals there are screeds of them and their supporters across the arts range from Harrison Birtwistle to Raymond Briggs and Anthony Sampson to Jan Morris.

These "nobodies" have also been doing their homework, monitoring Radio 3 output with extraordinary precision. They can prove that although, as Wright says, 80 percent of Radio 3 air-time is still given over to something you could roughly call "classical" music, more and more of that percentage is being shunted into dead slots when the average person has no chance to listen: during weekday working hours and (especially) between 1am and 7am. Between 7.30pm and midnight, when most people *can* listen, the classical content falls to 42 percent. Weekends are just as bad. On Saturdays there is no classical content at all between 2pm and 6.30pm.

Instead peak listening slots are increasingly devoted to light entertainment, jazz and so-called World Music, much of which is actually rock or pop soft-sold under another name. Asked to defend this creeping realignment of Radio 3 objectives, Wright has been coy. He has avoided invitations to meet the Friends, pleading lack of time, and he suddenly became "unavailable" when the *Today* programme raised the idea of gathering him and them together round a microphone.

But he is fond of issuing broad statements to the effect that his policies are increasing Radio 3's listener-appeal. Unfortunately there isn't a shred of evidence for this. In the late '90s, before Wright came to Radio 3, listening figures were indeed on the up. A year after the launch of his "exciting new developments" they hit an all-time low. Overall, since Wright took over, they have reduced by 7 percent.

Wright's attempts to open up Radio 3 to The People haven't won new audiences but they have driven off previously loyal old ones. Some record of achievement.

EDUCASHUN NEWS

THE schools empire of Christian fundamentalist used car dealer Sir Peter Vardy marches on. He has responded favourably to a "personal invitation" from Doncaster's mayor, Martin Winter (*Eyes passim*), to open a second "city academy" in the town.

If plans for Vardy's Emmanuel Schools foundation to build a 1,000-pupil school in Conisbrough are realised, it will bring to four the number of schools controlled by the millionaire. Vardy has said he plans eventually to run at least six academies in Yorkshire and the north-east. Earlier this year work began on the Trinity Academy, in Thorne, near Doncaster – conveniently after the head of the existing school, Thorne Grammar, was forced out of his job following a dodgy Ofsted report. Last month the "disgraced" head, Dr Tony Brookes, won an unfair dismissal case against Doncaster council and its director of education, Mark Eales. The tribunal found Eales had acted improperly in scheming to oust the head. And after Brooke's resignation Ofsted apologised to him and admitted its inspection had been flawed.

Vardy academies already up and running in Gateshead and Middlesbrough have proved controversial – the former because it hosted a lecture by an Australian preacher who believes in the literal truth of the Biblical six-day creation, and the latter, because shortly after opening last year it banned Harry Potter books from the library in case they opened the door to "Satanic" forces.

OH DEAR. Ofsted inspectors who criticised English teaching at a Croydon infant school sent a report that was itself littered with spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and sentences that made no sense at all.

Passing judgement that "subject leaders have not received suffiecient [sic] trianing[sic] ot [sic] help them do their job" may not be the best way to win the confidence of schools.

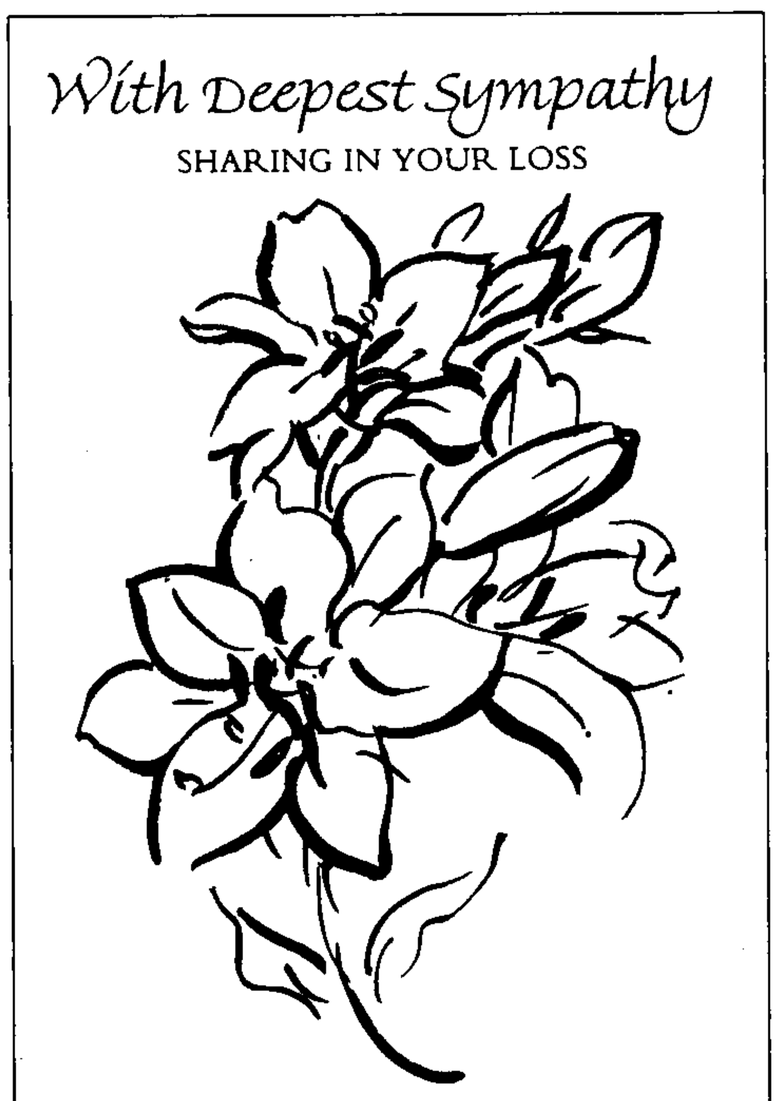
IN THE wake of a less than flattering Ofsted report on its performance as a local education authority, the Isle of Wight has been chosen by the department for international development to show former colonials how it should be done.

Selected teachers and county hall officials will spend five years teaching (or should that be beaching?) on the Caribbean island of Montserrat. The taxpayer will shell out some £104,000 in airfares, plus the cost of replacing the absent teachers, who will continue to be paid their IoW salaries, with supply teachers. The Montserrat jaunt follows hard on the heels of a similarly-priced exercise in Anguilla, a tax haven with one school and a population a thirtieth of the size of the Isle of Wight community being so badly served, according to Ofsted, by its educators.

"I sometimes wonder if these kids really live in the catchment area"

Letters

Private Eye



Sir,

So. He is gone.

We Eye readers felt that we shared your very special hate-hate relationship with Mr Moron; did not your most recent portraits of him capture the very essence of the man (Eye 1106, p19)?

Who could ever replace such an abundant source of piss-taking material? Come on if you're hard enough!

Oh, Mirror, Mirror – to the wall!

The bigger the moron, the harder they fall!

Respectfully yours,
MRS M. CRATES,

PS: Wha-hey!! Break out that Bolly!!

● ***The Editor writes: Could the large number of readers who have been sending these sort of letters to the offices, please refrain from any further correspondence. This is no time to gloat.***

Question of trust

Sir,

Nicholas Soames may indeed be fat, but I believe that the Framlington Dual Investment Trust (of which he is chairman) is like any other investment trust inasmuch as its purpose in life is to invest in the shares of other listed companies.

If so, it may well be shareholder in the NIMBY-annoying companies you list in your column, but I very much doubt that those companies are subsidiaries of the trust.

Or does the trust own more that 50 percent of the shares of all three?

ROBERT NOWICKI,

Via email.

20YR old female, 5'6", medium build, brown hair, enjoys going out, pubs, clubbing, swimming, cinema, shopping, meals out, blowing, etc, seeks outgoing male, for fun.

Maidenhead Advertiser

Cod piece

Sir,

While Muckspreader's recent article "A Fishy Royal Story" may have been an interesting read for some, on behalf of the Invest in Fish SW project funders and partners, I am compelled to point out that references to Invest in Fish SW were largely factually incorrect.

Contrary to Muckspreader's belief, Invest in Fish SW is a new and groundbreaking British-written project which is part funded by EU grant aid. South West Cost Benefit Assessment Study (SWCOBAS) was its working title during the 2-year preparatory phase, which was funded by M&S and WWF and not by EU grant aid.

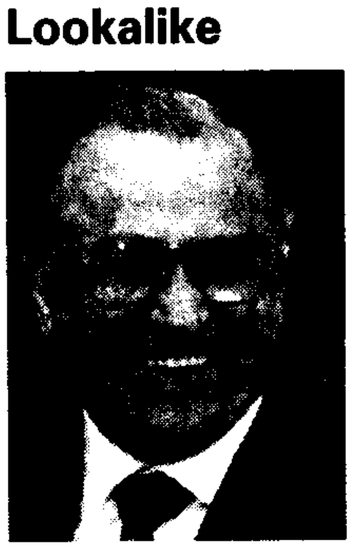
*The aim of the project (which has been well publicised in the national fishing press and by leading fishermen's organisations within the region) is much broader than to create marine protected areas. It is to work with fishermen, other stakeholders and scientists to develop a long-term strategy to secure sustainable fisheries off SW England. This strategy is apolitical and is wholly owned and managed by a steering group of stakeholders, not DEFRA or the EU. The project is **not** a Regional Advisory Council (RAC) and so the rest of the article's conspiracies on this subject are not relevant here.*

In summary, the project is an objective piece of work to map out a sustainable future for what is socially, economically and culturally an important industry to the SW region. For this reason it was correctly supported by HRH the Prince of Wales and we would hope that all political parties could sign up to this also.

NATHAN DE ROZARIEUX,

Project Manager, Invest in Fish South West.

Lookalike



Rumsfeld

Iliescu

Sir,

Am I the only one to have noticed the resemblance between Romanian President Ion Iliescu and US "Defense" Secretary Donald Rumsfeld? Have they ever been seen together? I think we should be told.

Yours,
BOB LADD,

Edinburgh.

LUVVIES

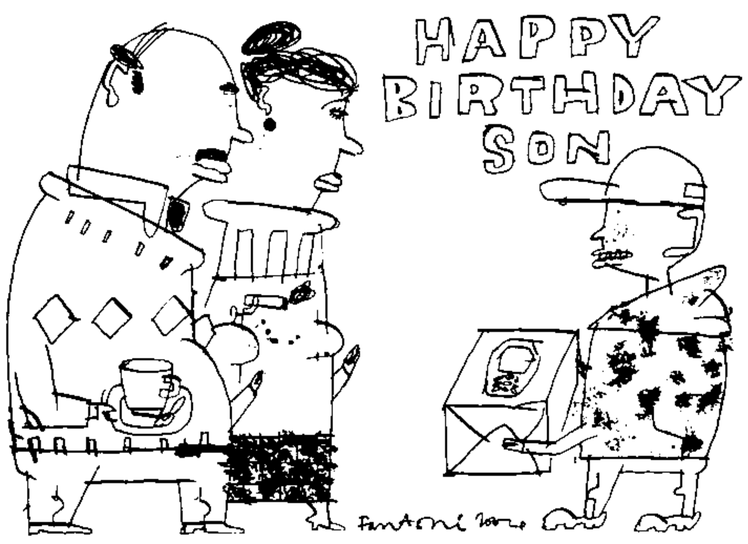
We were doing this scene in the morgue, and I'm lying on the table, my eyes closed, and the energy that was coming off Sean [Penn] was so powerful I started to cry. And Clint Eastwood says, 'Cut, Emmy, that was great, but you can't cry. You're dead.'

EMMY ROSSUM
Vanity Fair

Submitted by Mark Fisher

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Oh, a Nokia 6220 tri-band mobile. I asked for a Meccano kit"

Dunn moanin'

Sir,

I don't want to spoil your story about Amanda Platell putting the boot in at the Independent but the honours, surely, belong to Ian Hargreaves, hired as editor by the Mirror's David Montgomery to sack anyone – including me – who could do joined-up writing. Hargreaves only lasted a year before also getting the heave-ho. Then some clot gave him a job as professor of journalism at Cardiff University, which probably explains today's dismal standards in the Street of Shame. Felicitations.

PETER DUNN,

Bridport, Dorset.

Greene with ennui

Sir,

Re Stock Horror Probe. I note with interest that the shares of Greene King have considerably out-performed those of Regent Inns, however here in Cardiff CAMRA is wondering whether this is an unmitigated blessing. The Glassworks was a Greene King pub which served an excellent range of real ale (not just Greene King beers) and fully deserved the award of CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year in 2003. Alas, the pub has never received the award, because shortly thereafter the pub was refurbished and themed as Copa, selling continental beer at £2 per half and completely bereft of any real ale. Whilst CAMRA members are very happy to drink good continental beer, the centre of Cardiff is desperately short of good real ale pubs, particularly those selling anything other than Brains, and continental beers are available at a lower price at Chapter, the local independent arts centre. The branch has made these points to Greene King, but as yet to no avail.

MALCOLM JAMES,

Cardiff.

Lookalike

Higgins

Gollum

Sir,

While recently watching the snooker world championships, I realised how much Alex "Hurricane" Higgins resembled Gollum from the Lord of the Rings movies.

DIANE SAMPSON,

Via email.

Horse sense

Sir,

Although I, like Piloti, was horrified when I heard that the Edward Horner memorial by Munnings was to be moved to make way for some dubious-sounding "meditation centre", I have to put a rather different side to the story.

When I was in the church recently I not only read the proposal in full (something Piloti has evidently not done) but also talked at some length with an elderly local man who has been round for long enough to remember Lady Horner (Edward's mother, and the present inhabitant of Mells Manor's grandmother).

*He told me that the equestrian statue was **not** originally destined for the Horner chapel at all, but for the space under the bell tower where various other monuments are also placed. The floor was, however, found to be insufficiently strong so the monument had to be put in the chapel – where, I must say, I have always thought it looked inappropriate for its size, and quite out of scale with the small and intimate chapel. You can't actually see it very well there and I've often wondered why it was put there – now I know.*

So, although I hate change just as much as dear old Piloti, in this case it may not be quite the scandal he imagines. Although I do hope they don't glass in the Horner chapel!

Yours,
LINDA EVANS,

Via email.

"Darling – will you be my ex-wife?"

Big Ben...

Sir,

I also would like to defend BT's CEO Ben Verwaayen. He has yet to have my dead telephone line brought back to life, but his personal reply to my email speaks volumes. It should not, however, be the responsibility of a mega-corp CEO to handle individual customer complaints. Mr Verwaayen has, I am sure, much more pressing matters to attend to, but the fact that people like myself feel so frustrated at the level of so-called customer service from lower levels of BT, indicates that there is something seriously wrong with junior and middle management within the company.

DR FRANCIS SEDGEMORE,

Via email.

...Chimes again

Sir,

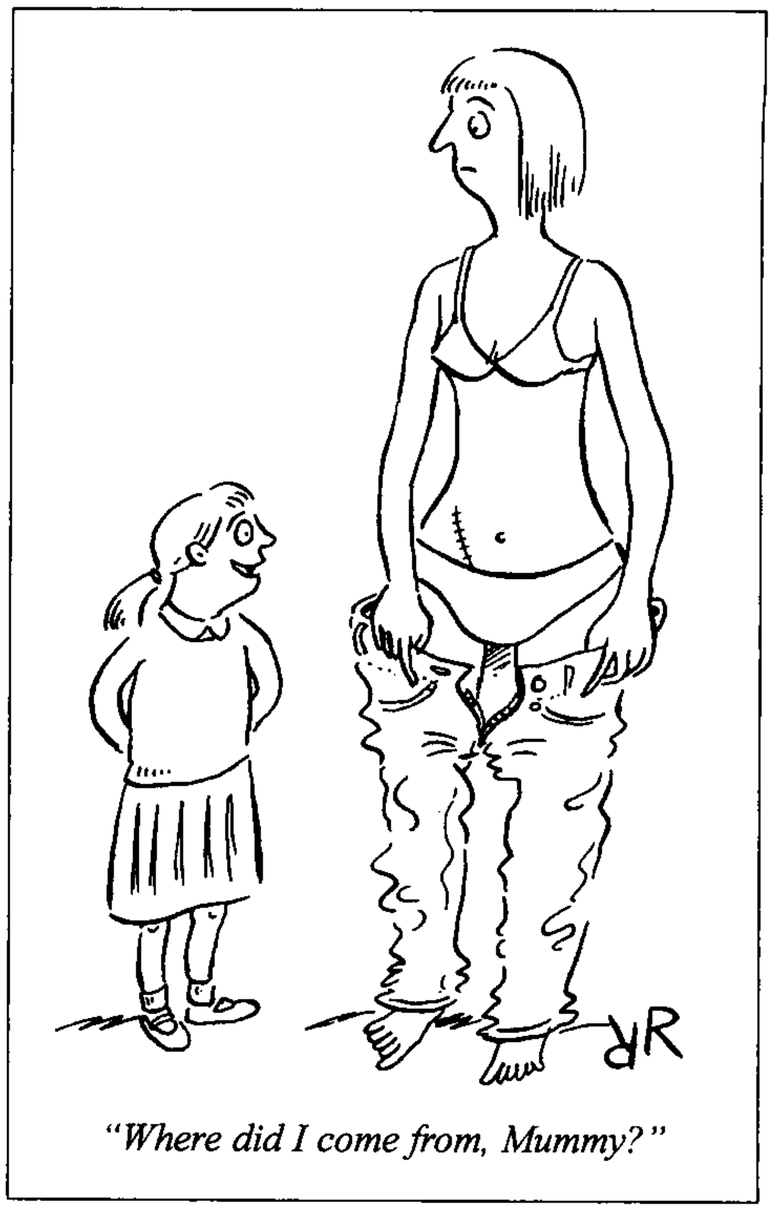
May I add my name to those who have had satisfactory dealings with Ben Verwaayen, BT chief executive? Fed up with getting little or no help from BT staff in general I took note of Phil Thompson's letter (1105) and recently sent Mr Verwaayen an email of complaint.

Within 24 hours he had replied and within another 48 hours my problem had been resolved.

Nice to report such dealings.

P.H. STONES,

Via email.



"Where did I come from, Mummy?"

King James

Sir,

Re Books & Bookmen, Eye 1106. I am no great apologist for James Heneage, the Ottakar's MD; he was, and probably remains, a difficult person to work for. However, as the very first manager of Ottakar's original shop in Brighton, albeit resigned after six months, and as a bookseller for nearly 30 years, I would just like to respond to a few of Bookworm's points. When I joined the fledgling company, around 16 years ago, I was not only paid a very respectable salary, but offered the longer term benefit of share options. The staff in my Brighton shop were paid above the then going rate, in the days of no minimum wage. You say that "some receive less than a tenth of Heneage's basic". That means that, at the very least, most are on around £13-£15k pa, and the managers are certainly earning much more than that. In retailing terms, these salaries are above average. The minimum wage (and many national retail and bookselling chains stick to it) is £4.50 per hour – by your own account, most Ottakar's staff are on at least £1.50 more than that. As to Heneage's salary itself, I would hazard a guess that most MDs running a successful company turning over £154m are earning a lot more than £126,000 – his investors, and staff, are getting very good value, I reckon. Look at the profits and share price over the last two years.

The staff survey? Any national retailer's staff survey will produce the same result, believe me. The shop-floor staff always resent "Head Office", its "interference" and its "inefficiency", and will always root for their local workplace and colleagues. I worked for Sainsbury's for three years, and I know what staff demoralisation is really like. Arranging stock levels for promotions is notoriously difficult, and frequently subject to publishers' lack of foresight – the "red faces" at the tills probably represent rage at them, as much as at the Ottakar's marketing staff.

As booksellers, and employers, go, Ottakar's are probably among the best. I resigned because of personal reasons, but also because I thought James Heneage was far too ambitious and not pursuing the right route for the future of a new bookselling chain.

I was wrong on every count, and I expect that most of his staff, the majority of Ottakars' customers, and all of his investors are very happy with the way he has taken the business.

Yours, somewhat grudgingly,
DAVID DALE,

Via email.

Healthy debate

Sir,

Let's have some facts about the new Public and Patients Forum system in England and the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) – not whisperings from unnamed "sources" (Eye, 14 May, p10).

The CPPIH had no shadow period and was set up from scratch last year. Despite that we created a network of 572 forums across England and recruited almost 5,000 volunteers by December 2003. We had many more applications than forum places available and I am delighted to work with such a set of highly-motivated and committed group of volunteers.

All this was done by a hard-working team in just three months. It was a huge achievement in itself and one that has been praised by many people – including the Department of Health.

The forums themselves have now been running for just five months and far from being hidden they are busy making an impact in their local communities.

We have numerous examples of how they are already making a difference on the ground: from extending consultations on changes to emergency services, to intervening on plans to close mental health care services; from reflecting patients' concerns on bringing services back to local hospitals, to working with GPs on provision of physiotherapy services; not to mention becoming a vital partner in ensuring a £10m hospital refurbishment scheme really meets patients' needs.

These are early days for such a ground-breaking and diffuse system for involving the public in health. One can only speculate as to why your informant should be so negative and ponder on the misinformation being peddled in your piece.

SHARON GRANT,

Chair, Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health.

Forum failure

Sir,

I was interested (but not surprised) to read your article about the failure of the new Patients' Forums (Doing the Rounds).

As a former chief officer of a community health council (CHC), I could say "I told you so".

A succession of New Labour health ministers, led by Alan Milburn, waged a silly campaign to get rid of the "patchy and ineffective" CHCs. Yet we argued that the CHC movement could have been modernised at a fraction of the cost of the several and complex bodies which replaced us.

Disgracefully hundreds of CHC staff were made redundant because of Alan Milburn's vendetta.

The new system of Patients' Forum is, as we all predicted, turning out to be a shambles.

What we need is an effective health watchdog to expose this cock-up – how about reinventing community health councils?

I'm not bitter.

Yours,
HELEN GEE,

Burnley.

Hazel nuts

Sir,

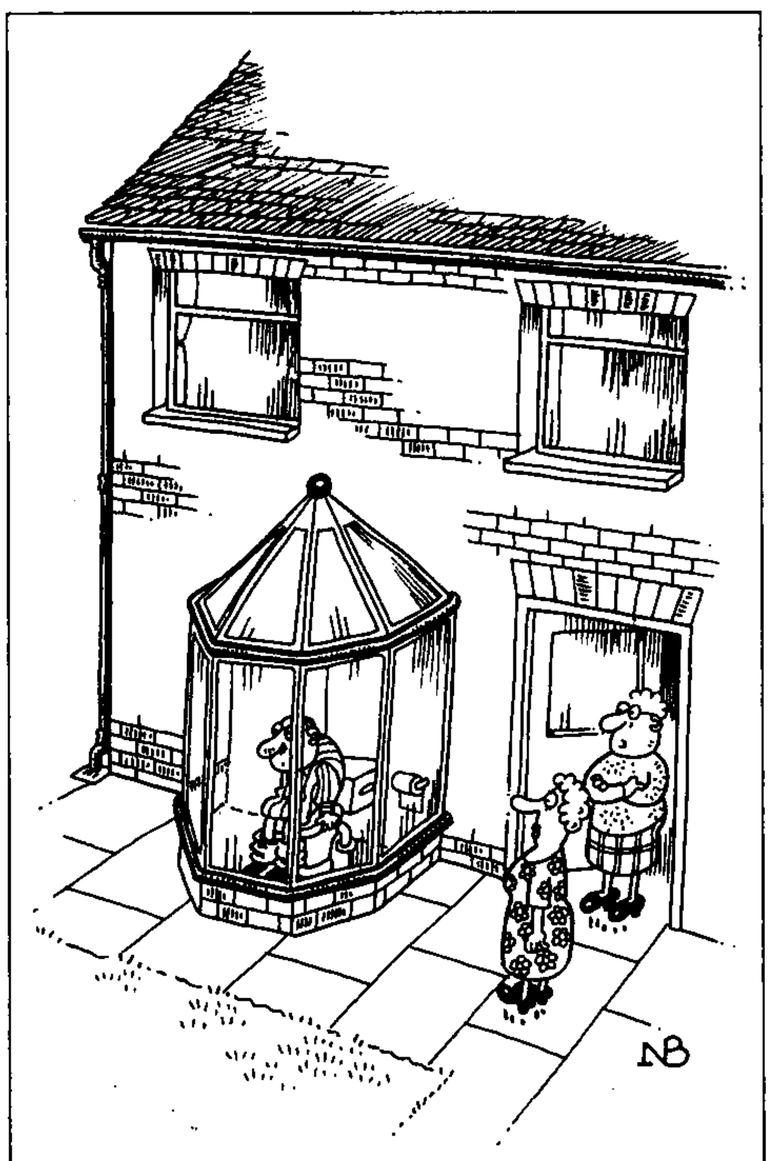
At least Lord Hunt has had the grace to have second thoughts about the abolition of community health councils in England; last autumn he made it clear in the House of Lords that he was profoundly unhappy with the CPPIH as it had developed.

Others more closely involved in the abolition of CHCs in England appear wholly unrepentant. The egregious Hazel Blears, now a minister of state in the home office, continues to cite the new system for patient and public involvement in England as a model that should be followed elsewhere in the public sector.

Even more perversely, as you report elsewhere, Alan Milburn appears to be proposing to extend the disastrous reliance of the CPPIH on voluntary organisations to provide services (from which stem many of the problems Patients' Forums have experienced) across the whole of the NHS.

Yours faithfully,
DONALD ROY,

London SW15.



"I wanted an en-suite, but Norman wanted a conservatory"

Bubb-ling under

Sir,

Labour's "big idea" to reform public services using charities' expertise (HP Sauce, 14 May) is already a reality.

The not-for-profit sector already delivers a wide range of personalised and professional services in partnership with the state. It now employs 1.5 million people – more than the NHS. Independent organisations now deliver 80 percent of social housing, and 40 percent of personal social services in the UK.

Involving charities in service delivery can mean hugely improved results for the public. By better knowing the needs of service users, charities can deliver to higher standards.

Witness the RNID's work in transforming audiology for the NHS, or the success of charities in running care homes and finding jobs for the "hard to help". Charities also have a vital role in campaigning for and catalysing change in public services.

Our work on "Sure Funding" is not about shuffling responsibility away from government. The aim is to build a more mature partnership with government where charities take on public service delivery, ensuring contracts and procurement are fit for the purpose.

The results we can achieve have aroused interest across the parties. The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, as well as Labour, have expressed strong interest in our initiative.

All this goes far beyond "flavour of the month" – the sector and its work are here to stay.

STEPHEN BUBB,

Chief Executive, Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO).

Knows his onions

Sir,

Dirty Des in Cumbria – no not quite – the Broughton in question is part of Preston in Lancashire. Hence no up-to-date sheep prices but possibly lots of tripe.

Kind regards,
DAVID COULSTON,

Preston, Lancs.

Name that candidate

Sir,

Re the inclusion of parliamentary candidate ffinlo Costain's biography in Pseuds Corner.

Touché – as a pseud would say.

Your exposure came on the day I was formally approved by the national party. Perhaps it was the Eye wot swung it.

Best wishes,
FFFFFINLO COSTAIN,

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Labour Party.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

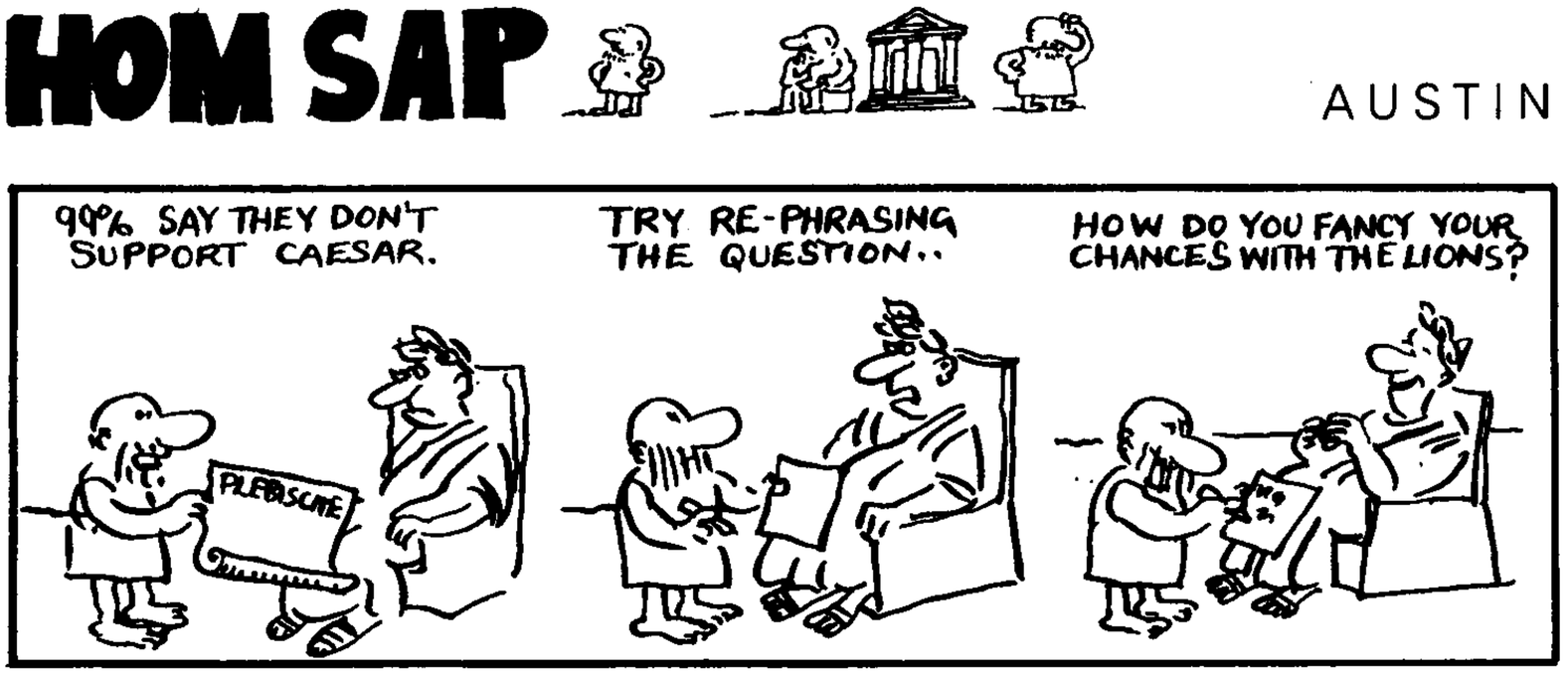
"It's a very psychological sport, cricket – once the kingpin goes down, all the other puzzles just crumble away."
ANITA ANAND, Radio 5 Live
(Anon)

"When I was 5-1 down I thought I was going to lose 18-0."
RONNIE O'SULLIVAN, BBC
(Sam Hall)

"Oh dear, his right leg collided with himself there."
MARK BRIGHT, Radio 5 Live
(Rosemary Fong)

"Newcastle can still make sure their hands are in their own destiny."
MARK SAGGERS, Radio 5 Live
(Matthew Flynn)

"The man [Alex Ferguson] is United. Cut him and he will bleed red..."
ALAN BRAZIL, Observer
(Geir Engene)



Letter from **Kabul**

from Our Own Correspondent

ON THE back page of a recent *Kabul Weekly*, the newspaper flogged by the baksheesh kids who congregate on Chicken Street, there's a cartoon showing a beaming globe, stepping forward to hand Afghan leader Hamed Karzai a bag stuffed with money.

Meanwhile a group of western suits lurks in the shadows under a banner that identifies them as "NGOs" – the well-heeled, non-governmental organisations such as the UN and countless other so-called "aid" agencies here in Kabul. Suddenly they pounce. The no-longer smiling globe is mugged and the NGO gang makes off with the loot, leaving Karzai with an empty bag.

In America's other – and apparently more successful – effort at liberation through military might, we Afghans are beginning to ask where the money promised for reconstruction of our country is going. So far only 16 percent of the $4.5bn "pledged" at the Tokyo conference has reached the Afghan government. The rest is in the hands of NGOs, whose staff live high on the hog.

They are paid on average $4,000 a month – most of it tax free – and seldom spend any of it in local shops. There is a new Sony Centre where they can buy the latest widescreen TVs and laptops, but that's about it. Most other shopkeepers only ever glimpse them as they are driven past in one of the 180 or so $75,000 Toyota Landcruisers here, most of them owned by the UN – known here by many as "the Toyota Taliban".

The cruisers ferry them from office to restaurant to guesthouse. Some of these are quite lavish. A French organisation has hired a four-star chef and Kabul's "first boutique hotel" has opened for business. Almost at once, some of the NGO guests there complained about the lawn. It was scraped away and replaced with something more "home counties".

There's a swimming pool at a central UN compound and regular parties and barbecues. Memories of a party held by the DHL courier group last November, when an opium pipe was passed around by UN staff, are still fresh. If boredom strikes, aid workers might also sign up for Tai Chi and Argentinean tango lessons.

Booze, pork chops, prosciutto, marinated steaks, shrimp, cigars and caviar are regularly flown in to the two PXs catering for westerners. Run by westerners themselves, none of their vast profit reaches the local economy. Now the German brewer of Bitburger Pils has a representative in Kabul signing up new customers. And Starbucks is here too "for office or home delivery". Again, none of this investment is much use to us locals.

True, a few Afghans are "lucky" enough to get jobs cleaning, serving tea or gardening. But they keep asking for too much money and are causing inflation in the new Raj. There's a poster in the Sharenaw Park that warns "recently a cleaner asked for a $20 a month salary". The average NGO wage is currently twenty times the Afghan equivalent and many would like it to stay that way.

The UN say we Afghans don't have the expertise or staff yet to handle funds for reconstruction and the NGOs will have to stay in town until they do. But our own Afghan bureaucracy is growing all the time.

The Afghan interim authority, for example, has assigned the Afghan ministry of women's affairs a complex of buildings that was once the home of the Afghan women's institute. The ministry is expanding fast to deal with the emancipation of women voters and it needs more space. But expansion can have disastrous consequences. The women's affairs ministry wants to build new offices on adjoining land occupied by the superb emergency hospital run by an Italian charity. It's the only one that offers free and expert treatment for those Afghans who tread on mines, get run over by Kabul's appalling traffic, or who are shot in arguments over something and nothing. If the ministry plan goes ahead, the hospital will close.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"When we received the telephone call, we thought the man must have injured himself while doing some DIY," Sheriff Barry DeLong told reporters in Hartland, Somerset County, "so we sent a police car and fire engine round to his house. My men had to break the front door down, but once they got inside, they could see what had happened. They were witnessing the least successful self-crucifixion in history, and it was supremely distasteful."

Lt. Pierre Boucher of the Hartland Fire Department then related what had happened after he had broken into the unnamed twenty-three-year-old man's house. "He seemed confused at first and was rambling on about walking on water. Then after a while he told us that the face of God had appeared as his computer's screen saver and told him that he was God's son, and should crucify himself immediately. So he'd found two large pieces of wood, nailed them together to make a cross, and placed them on his bedroom floor. He then lay down on it, and proceeded to nail his left hand to the makeshift cross, using a six-inch nail and a hammer. Only at this point does it seem to have occurred to him that he would be unable to nail his right hand to the board, and that he couldn't free himself either. So after considering the situation, he reached out for the phone, called 911, and asked us to assist him. When we arrived, it was unclear for some time whether he wanted us to free him and treat his injury, or to help him in nailing his other hand down."

After sawing off part of the cross, the firemen escorted the man to Sebasticook Valley Hospital, where the nail and wood were removed. "No charges will be filed against him," Sheriff DeLong confirmed, "because there is no crime here. Just uncompromising imbecility and possible insanity." *(Daily News [Bangor, Maine], 16/3/04. Spotter: Kathleen Maseychick)*

– o –

"*Until now, the exact reason for high fatality rates on cattle export voyages from America to the Middle East has eluded scientists," Jeisana Accioly told a University of New England conference. "The transition from a cold to a hot climate was usually blamed, but that didn't seem to be an adequate explanation for why as many as nine hundred cows can die during a single three-week voyage. However, our research has now proved definitively why they are dying in such large numbers. Put simply, they are gassing themselves to death with their own flatulence."*

Ms Accioly explained that the high protein diets fed to cows on long voyages were the main culprit. "These rich diets cause the cows to produce high levels of ammonia and methane gas, and in the hot and poorly ventilated conditions of a ship's hold, the fumes can quickly reach fatal levels. Nutrition that is more appropriate to the conditions is the answer, decreasing protein and

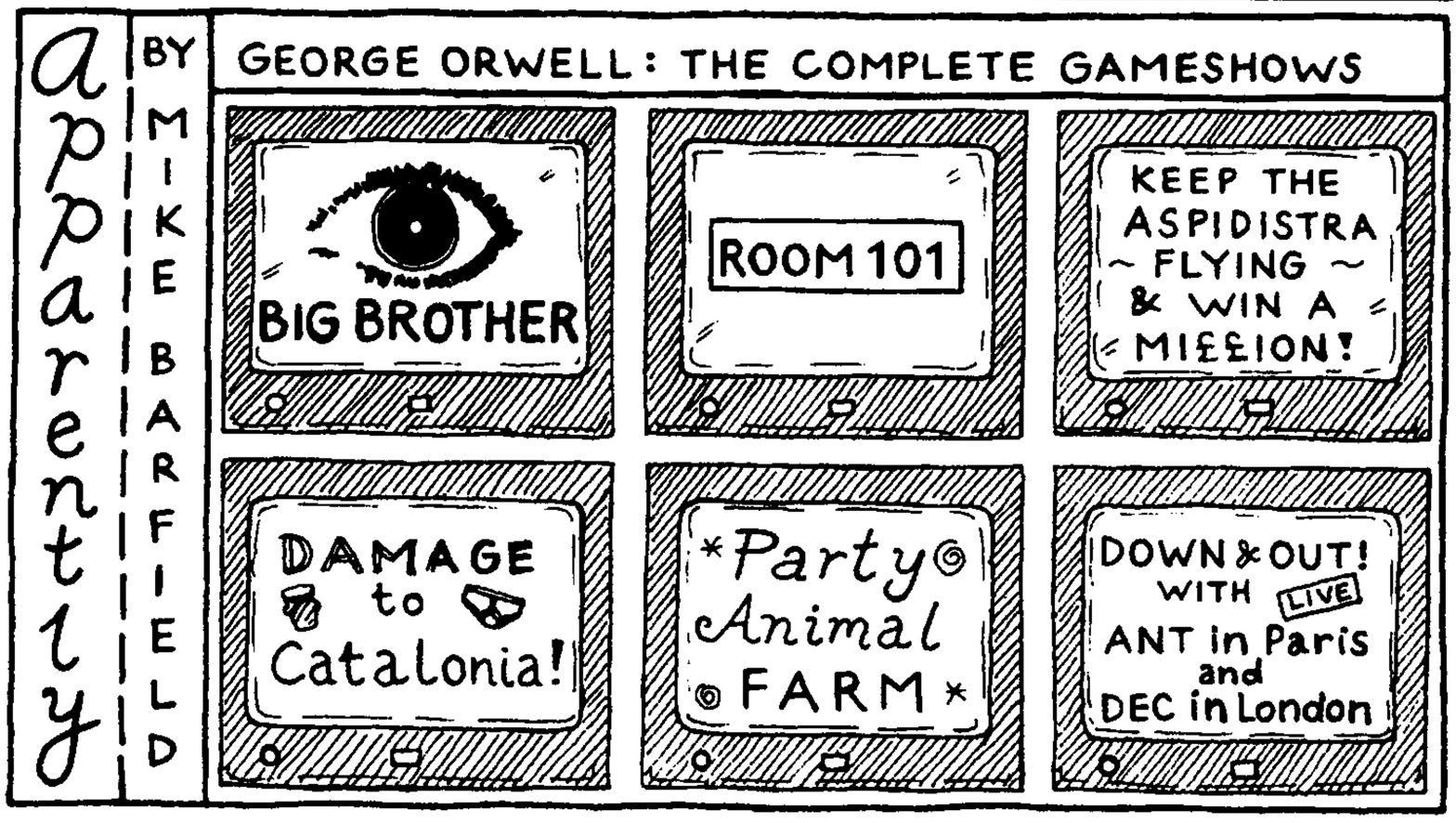
increasing the amount of hay and other roughage in the diet."

The conference then moved on to address the problem of cannibalism in chickens. (Brisbane Courier Mail, 16/7/03. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)

– o –

"The fact that I will now be restoring virginities in a place called the Virgin Islands is just a happy coincidence," Dr Robert Stubbs told journalists in his clinic in Toronto. "It wasn't a deliberate choice, sometimes that sort of thing just happens in life. What is important is that I can continue my work of convincing grooms that their brides are still virgins, without facing multimillion dollar malpractice lawsuits from dissatisfied patients."

Dr Stubbs, Canada's foremost genital enhancement doctor, was explaining why he is moving his clinic from Toronto to the British Virgin Islands. "My work involves narrowing the entrance of the vagina and restoring the hymen for women who want to get married. In many cultures, especially in South Asia and the Middle East, brides are still expected to be virgins. They can be shunned, and can even become victims of honour killings if their husbands discover they're not virgins, so my work is vitally important to them. However, the Canadian Medical Protective Association decided last year that they would no longer insure me against malpractice claims, which means I can no longer risk operating in Canada. But I can still get private insurance in the Virgin Islands, so as long as my patients can afford $2,500 plus the cost of the air fare, they can have their virginity restored there in a matter of hours." *(Toronto Globe and Mail, 16/3/04. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*


apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
GEORGE ORWELL: THE COMPLETE GAMESHOWS
BIG BROTHER
ROOM 101
KEEP THE ASPIDISTRA ~ FLYING ~ & WIN A MI£LION!
DAMAGE to Catalonia!
Party Animal FARM
DOWN & OUT! WITH LIVE ANT in Paris and DEC in London

"Quick! Wake up! We're going on strike"

THAT BLAIR FLOUR BOMB

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF...?

World-Famous Historian ANDREW ROBERTS imagines the horror scenario if the flour bomb had been deadly poison.

HISTORY is full of "if onlys" and "what might have beens".

What would have happened if Napoleon had won the battle of Waterloo? Would we all be speaking French and eating baguettes? What kind of world would we live in today if Hitler had been a woman? *(Keep going. Ed.)*

Just suppose the entire Cabinet had been wiped out by a deadly dose of Sarin last week:

- **The Queen would be forced to abdicate**
- **The sea level would rise, flooding vast areas of London**
- **House prices would fall, bringing chaos to the Stock Market**
- **David Beckham would be Prime Minister**

This is the nightmare world that could well have ensued if events had taken a very different turn – which they didn't.

It does not bear thinking about. But luckily the bomb turned out to be harmless and, best of all, I was commissioned to write this piece at £5 a word.

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POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Milton Shulman (90),
famous theatre critic

So. Farewell
Then Milton
Shulman

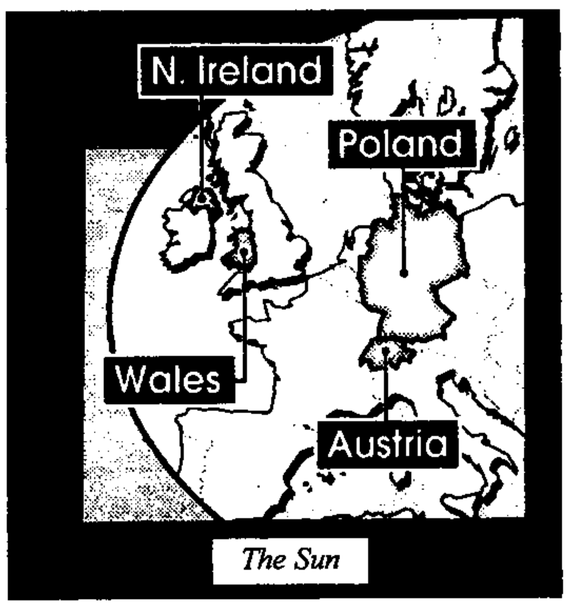
Doyen of
Drama critics

Yours was a
London run
Beaten only
By *The Mousetrap*

But now
The curtain
Has fallen

And we
Are going off
To catch the
Last train
Home.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

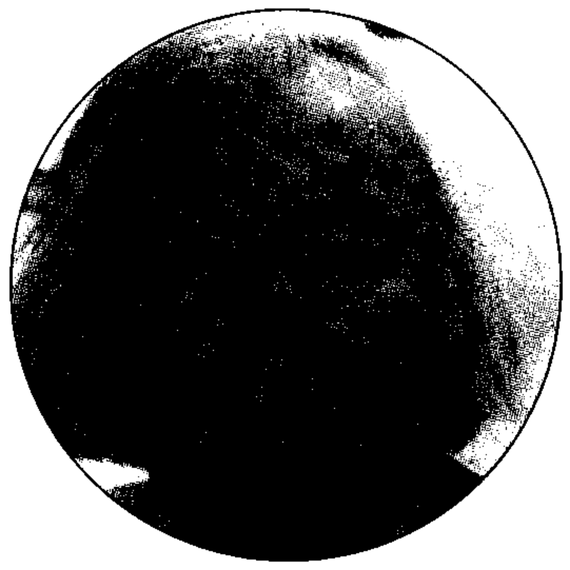


THE HAS-BEANO FEATURING BORIS THE MENACE

CRIPES! VIKES! VIPPEE!
NEW CULTURE MONITOR BORIS
I KNOW ALL ABOUT THE ARTS, READER
IT'S NEXT TO THE ELBOW!
LORD BLACK
Hello chums? Where's everyone gone?
Won't anyone talk to me?
Yes. You're nicked!
I WANT MORE PAIRS OF SHOES!
HOW ABOUT THE BOOT?
P45

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK



KEITH WATERHOUSE

Do you have strong feelings about spoons?

It's hard to find a decent spoon these days. Go into a cafe and you'll be more likely to be given a piece of wood or an awful plastic thing with little holes in it. It doesn't even have a name.

Do you have happy memories of spoons?

It's not just spoons that have disappeared. Whatever happened to the good old-fashioned cup and saucer? I can remember the world before the tea-bag when you poured tea with real leaves through a strainer. And it was a good, thick brew, not this tasteless, pale imitation of tea you get from a vending machine that's probably out of order.

Could I bring you back to the issue of the spoons?

You needed a good spoon in those days because there was something to stir. I've always been a three-spoonful man myself and you had to have a spoon to scoop up the sugar. I can remember the days of sugar rationing. Sugar was sugar in those days. Not some horrible little artificial sweetener in a paper sachet that gives you cancer.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Things aren't as amusing today as they once were. You can't make a joke about a frightful piece of plastic sticking out of a paper cup with a horrible piece of cardboard wrapped round it.

NEXT WEEK: Lynne Truss on 'Me And My Truss'.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

I am sure we all remember that wonderful story in the Bible about the brave boy who stood on the burning deck and refused to leave his ship while everyone was diving overboard and swimming away?

Does that remind you of anyone? Can any of the children tell me? Yes, Rashid, you've got your hand up and, of course, it's me, isn't it? Your vicar. Obviously I'm not on a sinking ship, and it's not burning either! In fact, the ship is sailing along perfectly happily and making very good time, thank you very much, with a full cargo and a fair wind!

But that hasn't stopped Mr Prescott taking the only lifeboat and rowing away with his friend Mr Brown.

I am still not quite sure why I, as your vicar, wasn't invited on their little outing to Iona, to visit the shrine of St John the Smith.

As it happened, I couldn't have gone on their ridiculous little pilgrimage anyway, because I had to be in Turkey attending an interfaith outreach workshop with our Moslem brothers.

Still, it would have been nice to have been asked! But don't think I'm getting at you, John and Gordon, just because you've been talking about me behind my back while you stuff oysters into your faces in some Scottish car park!

Oh, yes, I know what you've both been up to! Nothing escapes me, you know!

But don't worry! We believe in free speech in this parish!

If Mr Prescott wants to talk a lot of rubbish about shifting plates of food down his gullet, then he's perfectly free to do so!

And if Mr Brown's got nothing better to do than listen to this sort of nonsense when he should be concentrating on the parish finances, then that's fine by me!

Hey, I don't even mind if someone throws a bag of flour at me when I'm trying to preach a sermon, as happened at last week's Evensong!

Some people, particularly our local solicitor Mr Howard and his friends, got in a bit of a panic and ran for the doors.

But I didn't! No, I just stood there, like that boy on the burning deck, because I know that this sort of thing comes with the territory!

All great preachers have had to put up with people throwing things at them during the service, and I'd much rather have to cope with a bag of purple flour than a silly interruption from Mr Howard!

But, joking apart, I have been advised that to stop this kind of nonsense occurring again, we will have to speed up our plans

to build a 20 foot-high security wall round the pulpit, and in the meantime I will be conducting all services via an interactive video link from our new studio in the crypt!

For security reasons, there will be no congregation in the crypt and any cars attempting to park in the precincts of the church will be made subject to a controlled explosion!

I didn't want to do this, guys, but our new security adviser Mr Scarlett (who is a friend of Mr Campbell, and you can't get a much higher recommendation than that!) has insisted on tightening up all our arrangements, on the grounds that we can expect an attack on the church within 45 minutes!

But despite being left alone to cope with all these difficulties, you will be comforted to know that my resolve to carry on is stronger than ever.

You chose me in 1997 to do a job and, hey, I'm going to finish it!

In the words of the late Blessed St Margaret, just before she was led out and burned at the stake, "I fight on, and I fight to win"!

I've even written a chorus which I will have to sing on my own at evensong in the crypt:

"Fight on, fight on, there's a job to be done,
Fight on, fight on, there's a war to be won" (repeat)

Tony

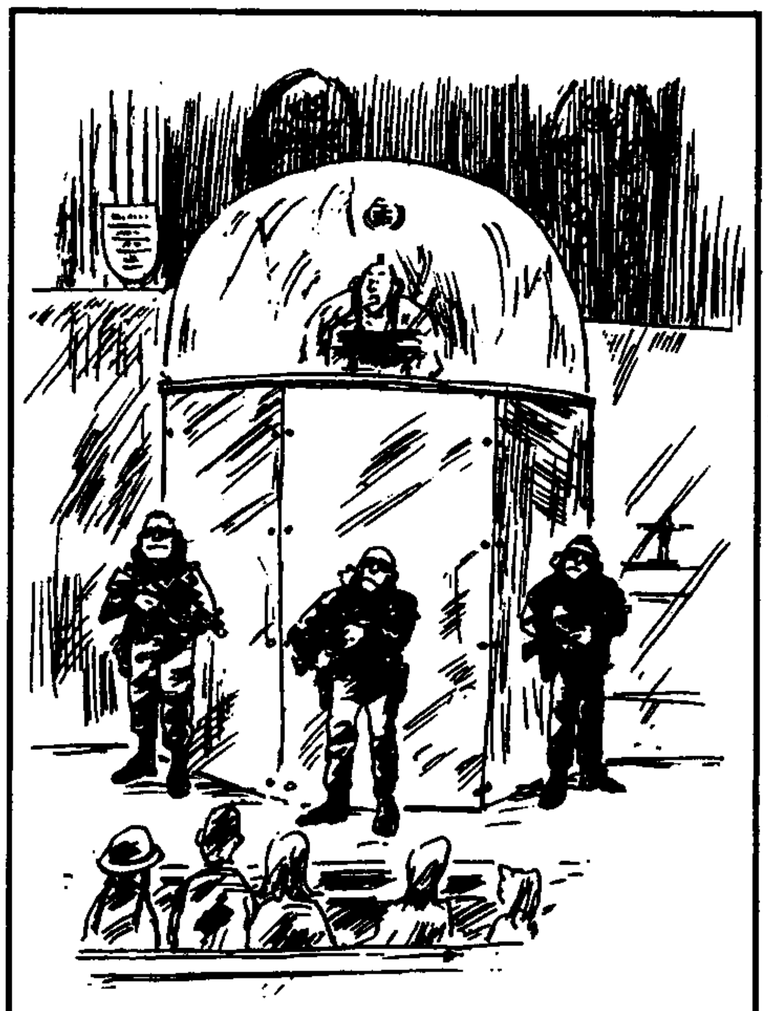
Poet's Corner

Verses by a local writer, 'Gordie', in memory of the late John Smith

The Lost Leader

You never lived to see this day,
The church you loved has lost its way.
If only you had been our leader
Instead of this stupid bleeder,
He would have done the job much better
And yet

This poem has been cut for obvious reasons. D. Hill, Acting Editor St Albion's Parish Newsletter



HOW IT WILL LOOK:
Local architect Alan de la Nougerede's sketch for the proposed pulpit security screen

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Rev Dubya Bush of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons who has fallen off his bicycle and sustained multiple grazes to his hand and chin. O Lord, let us pray that this great and good man is granted a speedy recovery and a new bicycle and let us also give thanks for the vicar's deliverance from his assailants armed with flour. We are asked to forgive our enemies but in this case we won't.

Readers Postbag

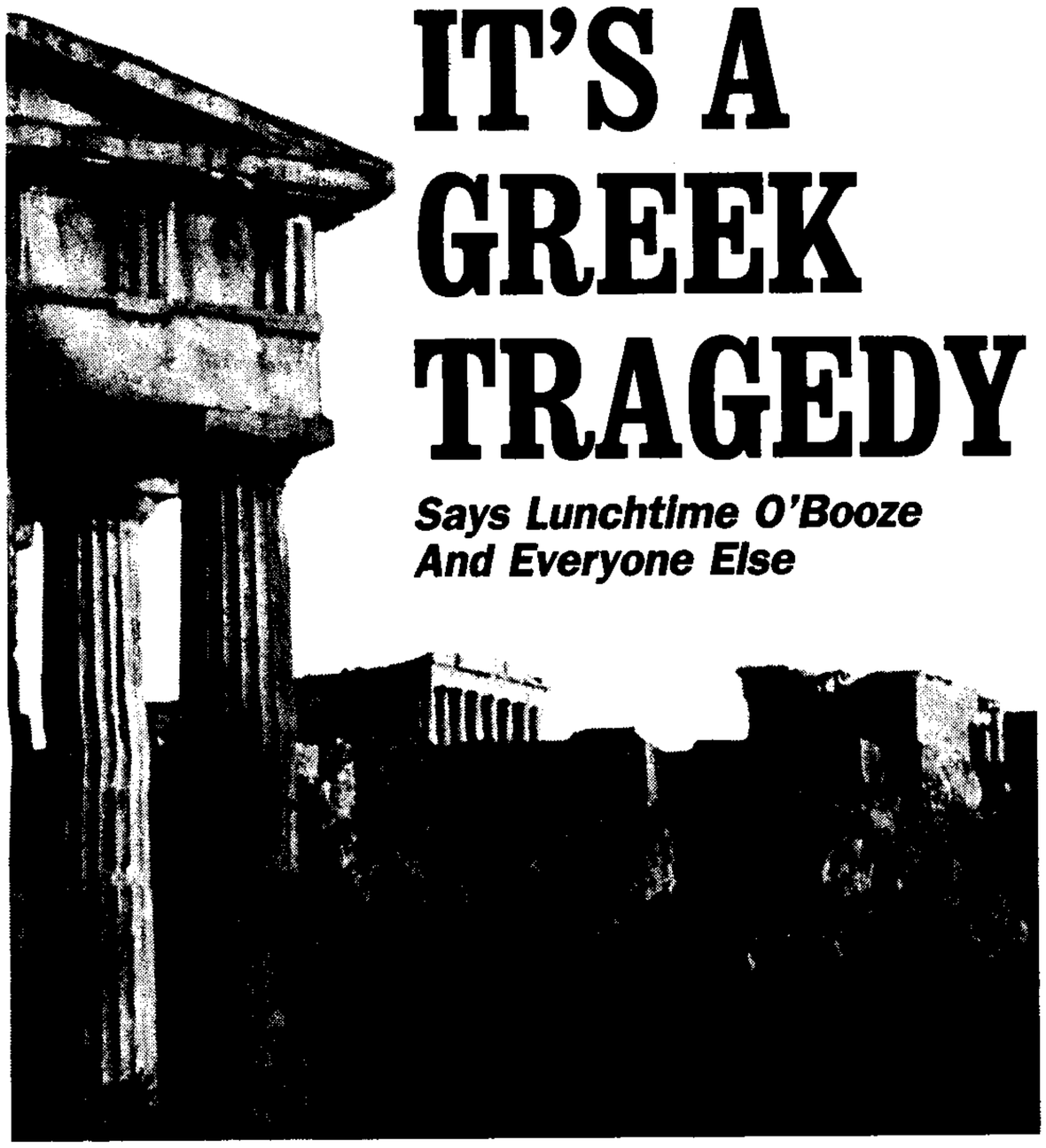
From the Former Editor of the Newsletter, Mr Campbell

Dear Sir,

I am reliably informed that people in the parish AT A HIGH LEVEL are putting it about that whilst working for the vicar I was some kind of bloody LOOSE CANNON and had to be restrained by the bloody VICAR NO LESS!!!

*If I find out who these people are I shall personally go round to their houses and smash their ****ing*

(This letter has been edited as unsuitable for a family newsletter T.B.)



IT'S A GREEK TRAGEDY

Says Lunchtime O'Booze And Everyone Else

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

Athens, Thursday

TODAY I flew into the city which is supposed to be hosting the Olympic Games in just six weeks' time *(Subs – please check)*.

And if it is ready in time for the greatest sporting spectacle the world has ever known, I will personally eat my moussaka and chips off the pavement.

Ready? The Greeks don't even have a word for it!

They may have given the world algebra and the Hovercraft.

But when it comes to world-class sporting venues fit for the 21st Century, Messrs Costas and Stavros are still living in the Dark Ages.

Must Troy Harder

The very first building I was shown by my Greek hosts when I arrived in the city was something called the Parthenon.

All I can say is that it looked like a building site.

"It hasn't even got a roof," I told my proud hosts. "If you think that is going to be ready for the Final of the 5000 Metres Volleyball, I must have another drink coming!"

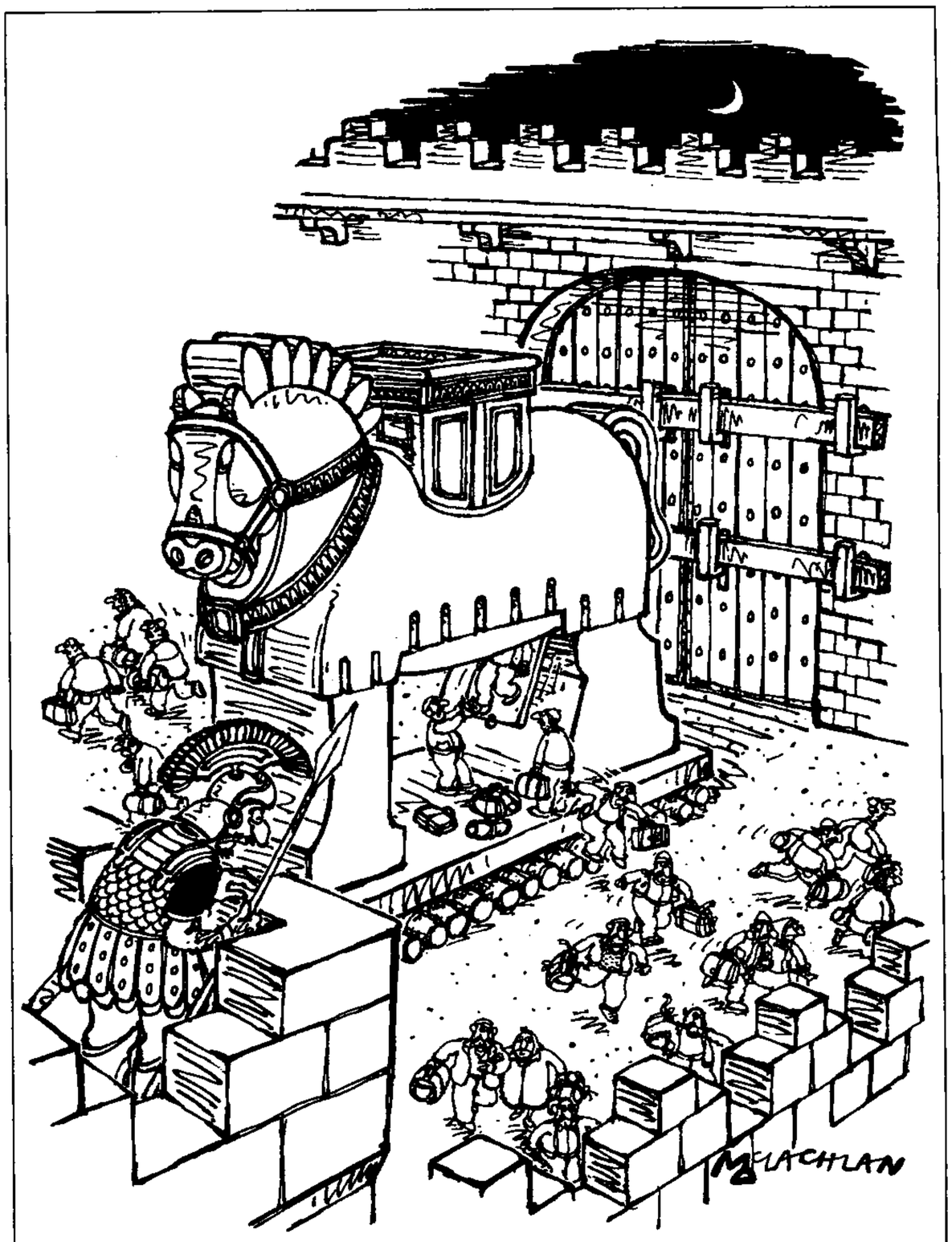
Marathon Drinking Session

And I'll tell you something else. The so-called security of the Parthenon was pathetic.

I could have been Osama bin Laden himself, for all they cared!

I could have blown it all up – except that it looked as someone already had!

Make no mistake, if those Greeks think the whole world is going to come to Athens just to see a heap of old stones like this, I'll eat my kebab and chips out of my 'Welcome to Athens, Home of the Olympics 2004' baseball cap. *(I think you've had enough. Ed.)*



"Bloody asylum seekers..."

THAT IRAQ EXIT STRATEGY IN FULL

Tony Blair exits No. 10

George Bush exits the White House

Er, that's it...

Baghdad Times

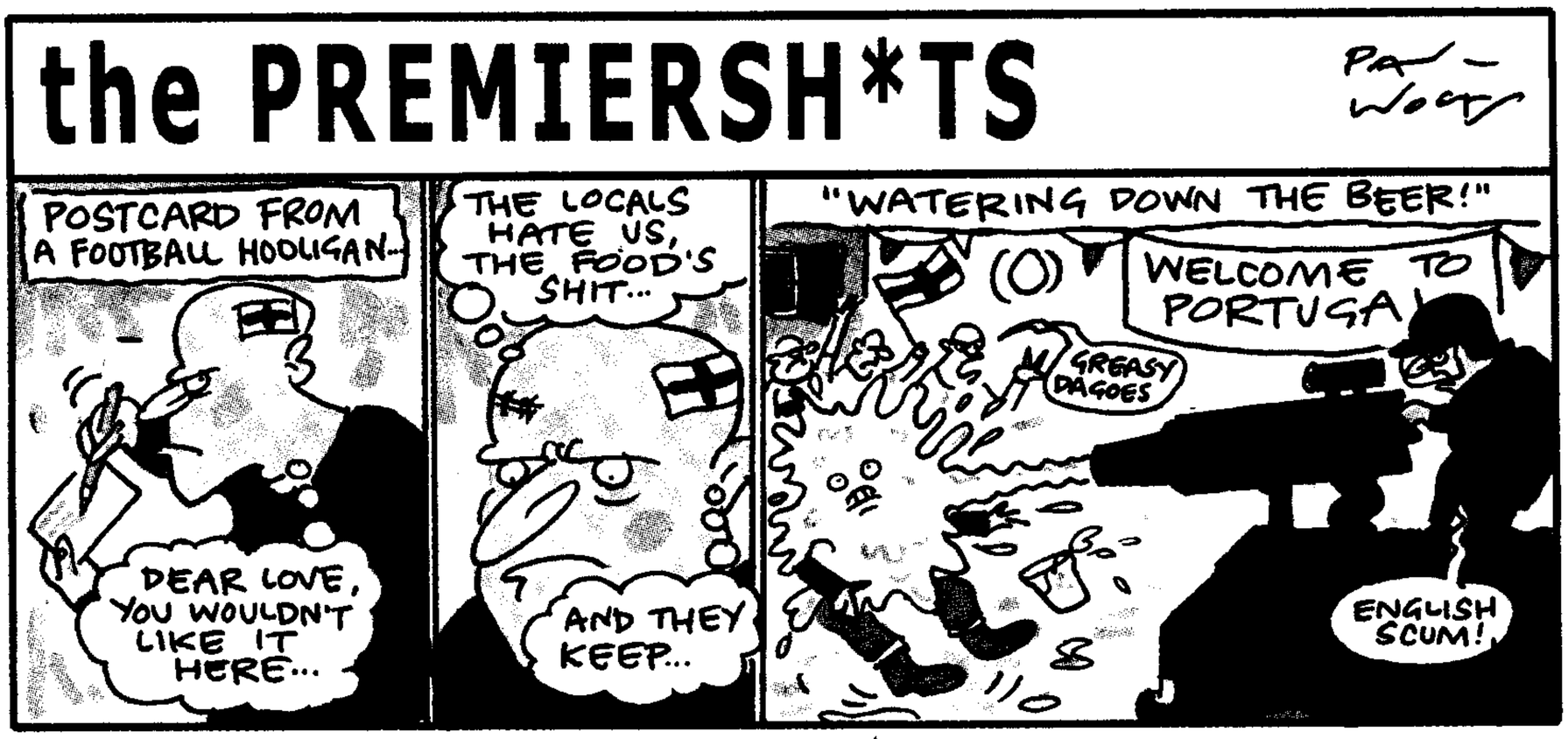
POSITIONS VACANT

Head of Iraqi Governing Council

This highly sought-after post has recently become vacant. The position would ideally suit someone who has had plenty of experience in nervously looking over their shoulder and who doesn't want to be alive for more than the next few weeks.

All funeral expenses will be paid.

Contact P. Bremer, the building next to the huge crater in the ground and the bombed-out armoured jeep



That Loch Fyne Car Park Menu In Full

Jealous Eels

– ❋ –

Seafood Plotter (totally shellfish)

– ❋ –

Fish 'n' Chippy (caught today)

– ❋ –

Choice of Deserters

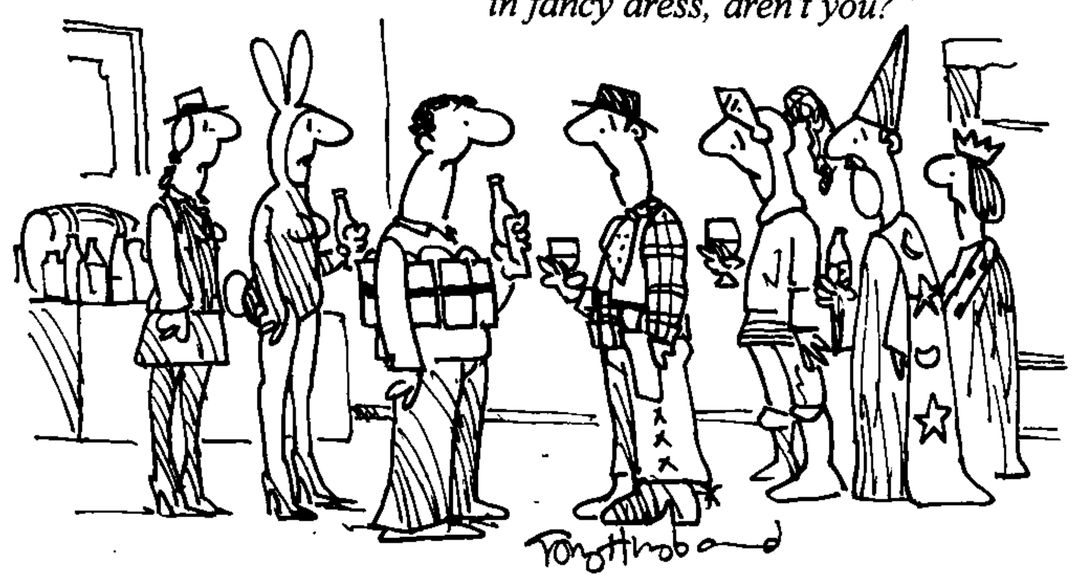
To Drink: Bitter

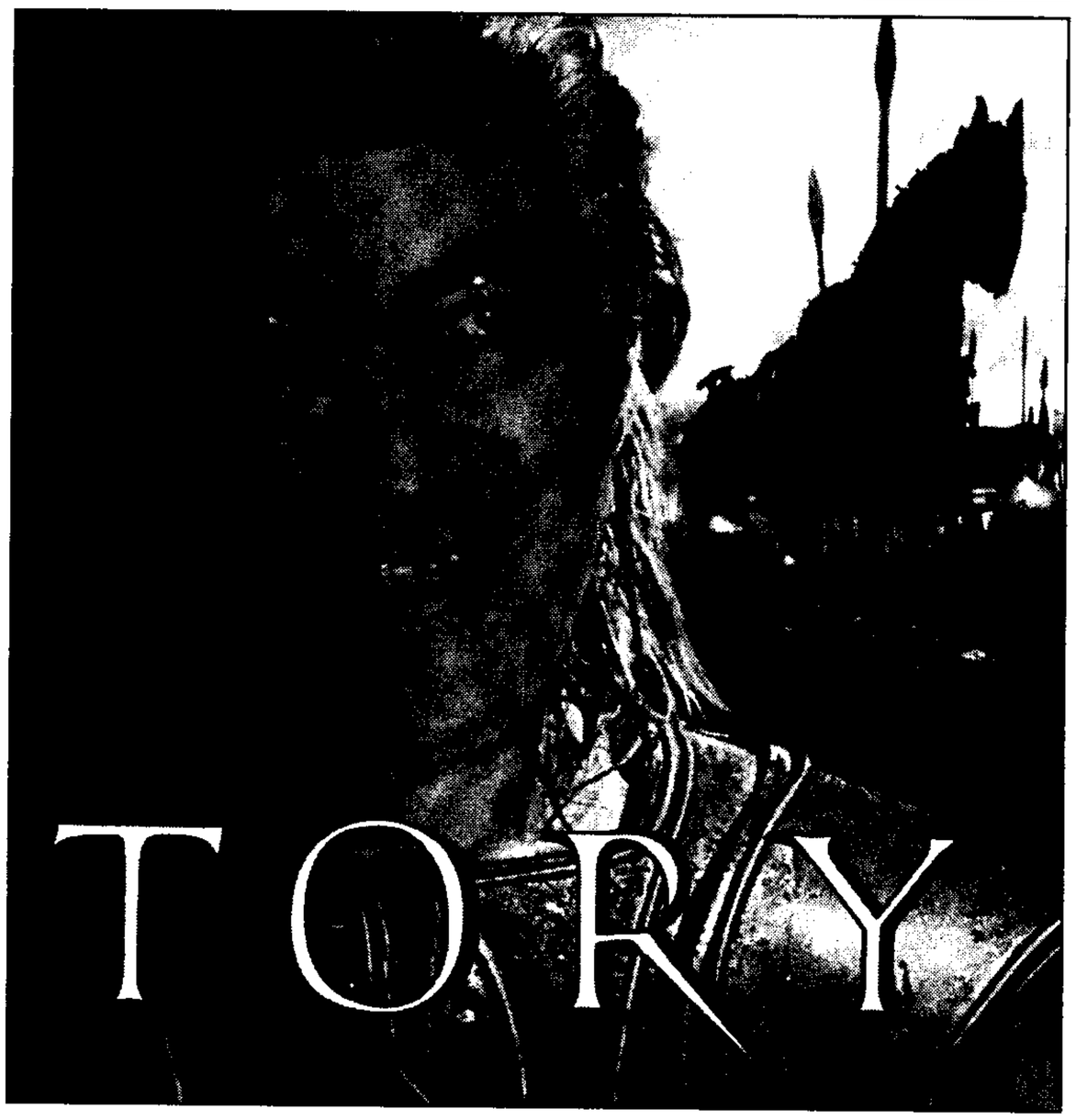
That Honorary Degree Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS BEII GEII TRES FRATRI CANTORES IN VOCE FALSETTO NOMINE BARRIUS, ROBINUSQUE ET MAURICIUS EHEU NUNC MORTUUS (QUONDAM UXOR 'LULU', DIVA CELEBRATISSIMA GLASWEGIENSIS CUM CARMINE POPULARE 'CLAMATE!') TRANSFORMAVERUNT MUNDUM MUSICAE DISCOTECHNIS CUM JOHANNES TRAVOLTUS HOMO IN TUNICO BLANCO IN ARTEFACTO CINEMATICO 'FEBRUM NOCTIS SATURNALIS'.

© The University of Manchester United (formerly The David Beckham Polytechnic)

*"Erm... we're just checking... you **are** in fancy dress, aren't you?"*

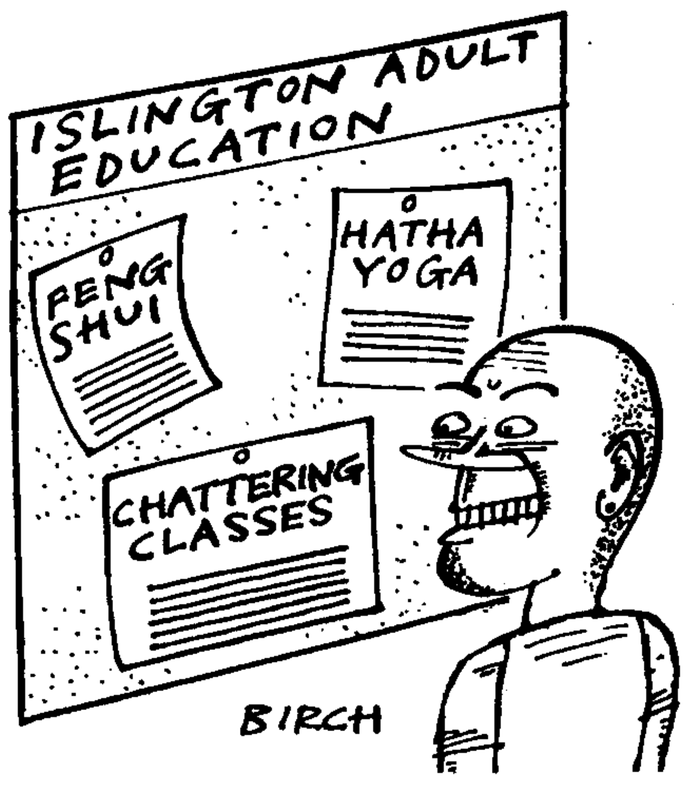




THE MIGHTY warrior Achilles (Michael Howard) decides that the war isn't going very well after all and that he is going to sit in his tent and not support it. He spurns the strategies of IDSysseus, who was both wooden and hoarse and, despite being the champion of the proud Maggamemnon, decides to be a heel and *(That's enough of this. Ed.)*

Eye Rating: Tragic

LEMPICKA
ROYAL ACADEMY
IT'S RICH BITCH ART ISN'T IT?
WE'VE ALL CHANGED A BIT SINCE THEN
THAT'S WHAT I LIKE IN A WOMAN, SOMETHING YOU CAN GET A GRIP ON
STORE ROOM
THE TITLE READS 'DOES MY BUM LOOK BIG IN THIS?'
SNAP!
CBASH!
CAN YOU DIRECT ME TO THE NEAREST GYM?
EXIT
HEATH



Late News

CELEBRITY PARENTS GIVE CHILD SENSIBLE NAME SHOCK

THE showbiz world was rocked today when a celebrity couple named their baby something sensible.

"I'm sorry, but we just like the name Christopher," said the rock star and his actress girlfriend, "it was my grandfather's name."

"I can't understand why anyone would foister a weird name like Christopher on a child,"said the teenage daughter of another rock star, Kiwi-Fruit Moonbeam Liquorice Banana Kangaroo Smith.

BOGUS ARREST AT PALACE

POLICE have confirmed that a man was apprehended inside the grounds of Windsor Castle demanding to be given an audience with the Queen.

"The man identified himself as Tony Blair and claimed that he was the Prime Minister of Britain," said Chief Inspector Knacker.

"We knew immediately that he was a conman because Gordon Brown is the real Prime Minister."

RAIL BONUS 'JUSTIFIED'

NETWORK RAIL has defended the bonus payments to its four directors, saying they're delivering an unprecedented level of failure over the past twelve months.

"We always believed these were the men who could deliver failure, but they've exceeded all our expectations," said a senior... *(cont. p. 94)*

NANNY STATEMENT

THE Government's announcement of a tax break of up to £140 a week for parents employing nannies has been widely welcomed within the profession.

A spokeswoman for Britain's leading Nanny agency described the Government's decision as "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious".

Lines Written On The Dismissal Of Mr Piers Moron From The Editorship Of The Daily Mirror

BY WILLIAM REES-MCGONAGALL

'Twas in the year two thousand and four
That Mr Piers Morgan was ignominiously shown the door.
Said the managing director of Trinity Mirror, Miss Sly Bailey,
"You are no longer fit to be the editor of a famous national daily."

The staff of the *Daily Mirror* had never enjoyed such a treat
As the sight of Mr Moron being frogmarched into the street.
He was not even given time to clear his desk,
His crime being considered so grotesque.

On the *Mirror*'s top floor, the bosses had had enough.
"For too long we have allowed you to get away with this appalling stuff."
They then read out a list of his past misdemeanours.
"Thanks to you, our great newspaper has been taken to the cleaners."

One thing which particularly enraged the men in suits
Was the sharetipping scandal which gave Moron the chance to fill his boots.
Readers may recall this murky affair
When the *Mirrror* told readers to buy a particular share.
The name of the company concerned was Viglen -
"It will rise as high," said the City Slickers, "as the tower of Big Ben."

Only then did it emerge that Moron himself, no less,
Had invested heavily in the shares before his paper went to press.
No sooner had his readers rushed to follow suit
Than Moron sold out, thus doubling his loot.

For a long time in this vein I could continue to bore on.
About the financial shenanigans of Mr Piers Moron.
Of course I have no desire to mention his "bit on the side"
(Whose name, incidentally, was Miss Marina Hyde).

Thus ended in ignominy his far from glittering career
Over which very few of my readers will be inclined to shed a tear.
The offence for which Mr Moron was given the sack
Was even more heinous than that committed by Lord Black.

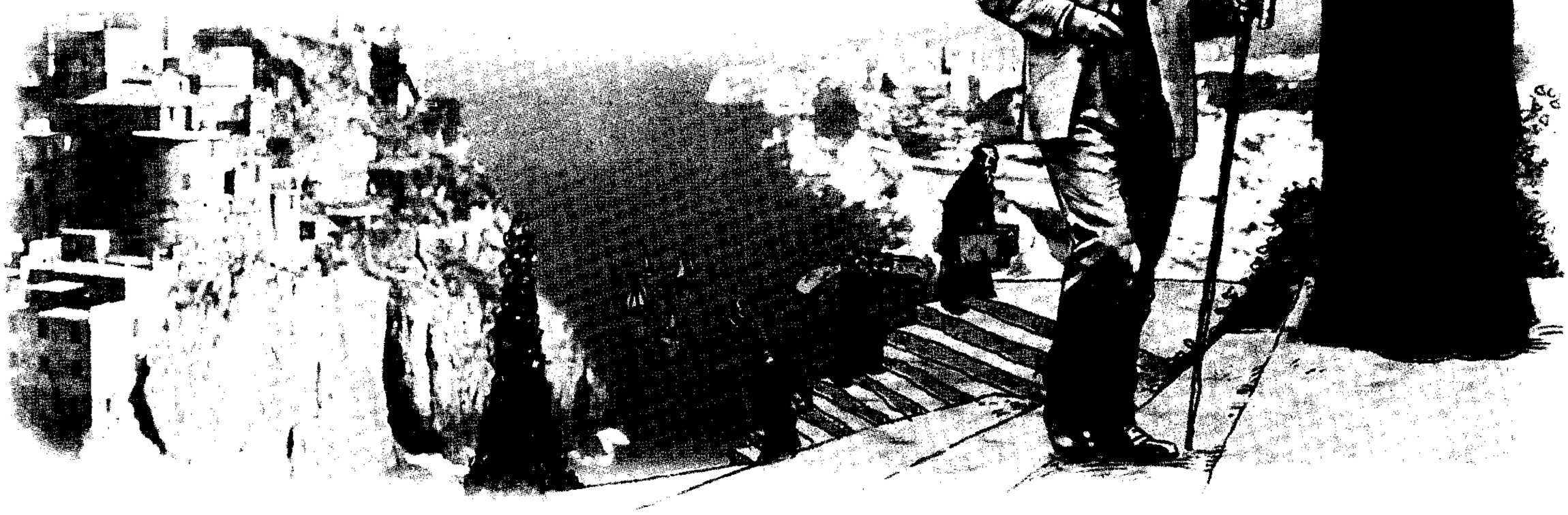
By publishing pictures of an alleged act of torture
In place of the customary headline "Phew! What A Scorcher!"
It was clear to all the nation that Moron's pictures were faked
And his defence for publishing them was blatantly half-baked.

"Our photos showed events of the type that might have taken place,"
Said Moron, in a bid to save himself from complete disgrace.
But even for all this he might not have been shown the door
If the sales of the Mirror had not been falling through the floor.

His faked photographs and collapsing circulation
Combined to inflict on him a terrible humiliation.
But perhaps this sad figure will somehow manage to survive
As the host of a soft-porn chat show on Channel Five.

MONASTERY OF DREAMS

by SYLVIE KRIN, author of *'Heir of Sorrows'*, *'La Dame Aux Camillas'* and *'Never Too Old'*



THE STORY SO FAR: Seeking peace, solitude and spiritual illumination, Charles makes a pilgrimage to the remote Greek monastery on Mount Bathos.

Now read on...

CHARLES climbed the last of the seven thousand, four hundred and eighty-four steps cut into the rock face, which for centuries had led pilgrims up from the sandy shore to the holiest spot in the Greek world.

Behind him struggled a procession of aged monks carrying the Prince's few simple possessions – his special herbal double bed, his water-colour painting equipment, his forty suitcases full of freshly-pressed Fry & Laurie shirts, a selection of his favourite talking plants and his beloved polo pony, Mummy's Boy.

At the top of the steps, standing in the monastery's tiny courtyard, looking down to the wine-dark Aegean thousands of feet below, was the venerable, black-cloaked figure of the abbot, Father Stassinopoulos.

"Welcome to Mount Bathos, sir," said the bearded holy man. "Truly God has sent you here, whoever you are."

"Er, Kalamari," Charles mumbled, searching hurriedly through his phrase book for an appropriate greeting, "er, retsina, para kalo."

The old man smiled sympathetically, as he led Charles through a gloomy passageway to his tiny cell, with its window looking out on the gaily-painted fishing boats dotting the distant sea.

"I will leave you alone now to enjoy the silence," said the abbot. "We eat bread and water at half-past three in the morning, which is our main meal of the day, and then we pray the rest of the day until we go to bed at 5 in the evening. You will soon get used to our simple ways..."

SIMPLE ways. That was what Charles had been craving for so long. And here at last on Mount Bathos he felt he had come to the very heart of what the inner-search thingie was all about.

No phones. No television. No journalists hanging around. And, best of all, no women!

Of course, Camilla was a very good egg, in all sorts of ways. And his mother, the Queen, she had her good points, game old thing, and all that.

But goodness me, these monks really had the right idea.

Time to oneself, without some woman breathing cigarette smoke over one's organic honey-flakes at breakfast, and asking silly questions like "Do you really have to wear a Guards tie with your pyjamas?" or "When are we going to get married, Chazza?"

As he heard the distant chanting of the monks in their chapel hewn from the living rock, he thought of all the sacred wisdom which had been accumulating in this holy place for two thousand years.

What was it his friend and mentor Sir Laurens van der Post had told him, when they were visiting the site of the ancient oracle on the island of Paxos? "It's all Greek to me"? No, that wasn't it.

"Never on Sunday"? No, that wasn't it either.

It would come to him later...

"I WILL come to you later," the old monk had said. And now here he was, his grizzled beard glinting in the candelight, ready to show him the greatest treasures the monks had accumulated over the millennia.

Charles followed him through the labyrinth of narrow passages, as the monk's sandals slapped on the polished stone slabs ahead of him.

Stronger and stronger grew the smell of incense as they approached the tiny door of the "Holy of Holies".

Charles's heart began to thump faster. This was incredible, he thought. Here he was at the very heart of this whole Orthodox thingie, the faith of his Greek ancestors, going back through his father all the way to... was it Agamemnon, who he'd seen in that new film Camilla had dragged him to in Cirencester...

"... And here you see the very precious icon of Agios Nikolaos."

The abbot held up a flickering candle to illuminate the cracked surface of the 6th-Century masterpiece.

"And here we have another very sacred icon showing Agios Giorgios, or Saint George as you call him."

"Oh, yes," enthused Charles. "He comes from my country, Saint George of England."

The old monk looked puzzled, but then, his face lighting up, he moved on round the corner. "And here you see the greatest jewel in all our collection!"

Charles was momentarily blinded by the hundreds of candles burning in the incense-laden air at the foot of the largest icon of all.

"Very holy woman, many miracles," murmured the abbot reverently, "greatest lady who ever lived."

As the elderly monk prostrated himself on the floor, Charles's eyes became accustomed to the half-light.

No, oh no, it couldn't be. Surely not!

But the face looking down on him with an expression of serene contempt was unmistakable.

"Yes," whispered Father Stassinopoulos, "it is Agia Diana, Saint Diana."

At that moment, an Aegean breeze wafted down the passageway, extinguishing the candles in a sudden gust.

Charles stood alone in the darkness. It really was, what was the word? Appalling...

© Sylvie Krin, runner-up in the Betty Trash Romantic Fiction Award 1994, sponsored by EasyJet, "the no-planes airline".

DIARY

JORDAN AND HER GUYS

Drop-dead gorgeous and so totally to die for. That's what went through my mind when I first set eyes on hunky top people's Chancellor Gordon Brown.

At the time I was going out with TV weathercaster Ian McAskill. What is it with me and weathermen? To give him his due, Ian certainly knew what to do with his hands. But our relationship wasn't going anywhere. For all his talk of sunny spells I never felt he was interested in me for myself. It was time to move on.

I had recently had my bosoms made bigger once more. I needed someone who'd be interested in them for themselves.

It was at a celebrity reception at top club Number 11 Downing Street. From the start, I could tell Chancellor Gordon fancied me something rotten. And believe me the feeling was neutral.

He couldn't take his eyes off them, for starters. Talk about fiscal expansion! I could see he wanted me like mad. But after we had been formally introduced I spelt out my rules. I didn't mind a bit of a kiss and a cuddle, for friendship's sake. But we wasn't to go all the way for a month, or four weeks, whichever was the shortest. And nothing kinky, mind.

As I ran through the rules, that mouth of his hung open like a dog's. To his colleagues, he may have been Chancellor of the Whatever. But to me he was so just a great big bloke.

He may have looked gorgeous with a fantastic body, but Gordon turned out to be a right shit through and through. Frankly, he didn't know how to handle a woman. There I was, dressed to kill in my all-in-one skintight black catsuit, and within a few seconds he had turned to talk to someone else. I can't remember if he even touched my boobs, to be honest.

What is it with me and politicians? Gordon let me down badly. But it would never of worked. Okay, I could of ended up the Chancellor's wife but what's so great about Downing Street? I'd imagined it would be a top-of-the-range luxury mansion. But it was just a normal house, nothing special. I've seen better up Brentwood.

Anyway Gordon was such a sad pathetic loser, with his tongue hanging out and that. I was better off without him. But I'm a survivor. I knew I had to ignore him and keep my dreams alive. Luckily, exactly thirty seconds later who should elbow up to me but one very tasty guy with glasses.

"Hello," he says holding out his hand in the general direction of my famous chest. "I'm top TV historian Dr David Starkey".

Starkey by name, Starkey by nature. There's nothing I don't know about men and I knew just by looking that underneath that waspish exterior he was panting to rip all my clothes off and take me from behind, on top, me on top, him at right-angles, you name it.

I admit it, I was bowled over by his sunny personality and way with words. What is it with me and historians? Okay, so Simon Schama had let me down badly, and Andy Roberts had shown himself a sick bastard. Sure, I should of been able to see the warning signs, but let's face it I'm a woman who's not half bad-looking, and there was something about them I couldn't get enough of.

David Starkey was talking about the Second World War. "That's terrible news," I said, just to show I had brains as well as boobs. "No one even told me about the first" . He proceeded to tell me about the Western Front and the Battle of the Bulge. I felt he oozed sex appeal and judging by the bulge on his western front Dave felt the same way about me. My eyes had told me Chancellor Gordon was less well-endowed in that department. No wonder he looks so glum.

Before I saw Dave again I had my boobs enlarged specially but as I took off my bra I told him no touching as they was still a bit sore.

But no way, he wouldn't play ball. I didn't see him for dust. I can never forgive him for running away on me like that. Yes, Dr David Starkey let me down badly. He had showed me his nasty side. I should have realised he was only after a quick shag with Jordan the glamour model, and he was never interested in getting to know Katie.

Before I met the Rt Rev George Carey for the very first time, I checked into the clinic to get my boobs made bigger. After all, it's not every day you get to go out with an Archbishop of Canterbury.

I had fancied George for ages. What is it with me and clergymen? He was the strong, silent type. I like that in a bloke. And he always looked drop-dead gorgeous in his cope and mitre. If he wore anything underneath he wasn't telling – but I was sure as hell determined to find out.

At that time, I was struggling to get over my doomed relationship with top TV quizmaster Bamber Gascoigne (if he could behave like that in front of me, God knows what he was capable of when I wasn't there). In my devastation, I longed for the reassuring touch of George Carey's great big hands playing my body like a piano.

Before I went into his church, I spent hours in front of the mirror making myself look a hundred dollars. I shaved and plucked all the crucial areas – and I mean all (thank you, Gillette!) – and in my wet t-shirt and diamond thong I sat hypnotised below the pulpit as the sun sparkled on his spectacles. So you can imagine my excitement when one of his henchmen touched me on the shoulder and invited me up to the front for a one-on-one.

But when I reached the rail, they went all pervy on me, making me bend my knees and kneel right down on the floor with my hands clasped together across my boobs. What the hell was that all about? No way was I having any of that. "I'm very sorry!" I yelled as I exited that building. "But it doesn't really do it for me."

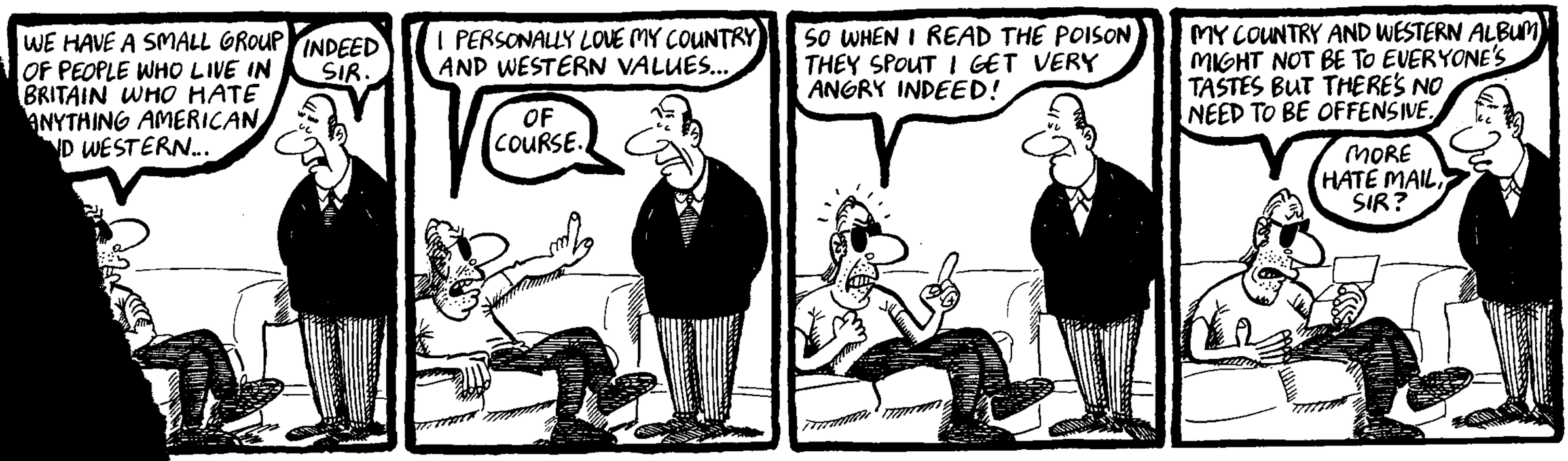
And that was the last I ever saw of him. He let me down badly, did the Rt Rev George Carey. All right, I had encouraged him, but he hadn't thought twice about making me look a fool.

But's now it's time to move on and put all the heartache behind me, time to let the real Katie Price emerge from the shadow of top glamour model Jordan. To celebrate the new me, and since it's summer, I'm popping into the clinic to add just an inch or two to my boobs. Then I'll be irresistible when I finally get to meet drop-dead gorgeous Sir Nicholas Serota, who I've fancied for ages. What is it with me and art curators?

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


WE HAVE A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN BRITAIN WHO HATE ANYTHING AMERICAN ND WESTERN...
INDEED SIR.
I PERSONALLY LOVE MY COUNTRY AND WESTERN VALUES...
OF COURSE.
SO WHEN I READ THE POISON THEY SPOUT I GET VERY ANGRY INDEED!
MY COUNTRY AND WESTERN ALBUM MIGHT NOT BE TO EVERYONE'S TASTES BUT THERE'S NO NEED TO BE OFFENSIVE.
MORE HATE MAIL, SIR?

Literary Review

Down mammary lane

Being Jordan
Katie Price
(John Blake, £16.99)

ASK anyone in the entertainment business about Jordan and you'll get anecdotes, dirty jokes but mostly begrudging admiration. Jordan, the line goes, cannot be a brain-dead flibbertigibbet because to remain camped on tabloid frontpages for a decade you have to have an understanding of the modern media meat-market. There are countless silicone-enhanced carcasses lying forgotten by the celebrity wayside to prove the point.

It follows that Jordan must recognise that her time is running out. Age *shall* wither her, those barrage-balloon breasts will succumb to gravity or detonation, and another lads'-mag honey with evermore preposterous norks will then adorn the frontpages. To keep her child in Gucci-nappies she needs income – she needs a story, and here it is.

There are many reasons not to read this book – it's boring, it's pointless, it's about as edifying as a mouldy Jaffa Cake and to readers of *Heat!*, *Hot!*, *Hello!*, *Now!*, *OK!*, *Zoo* and many other monosyllabic toss-rags it'll all be old-hat. But as an insight into how someone like Jordan can make large sums of money for little more than having fake tits it's instructive. Let's feel Jordan's metatext...

The idea, no doubt dreamt up at a PR agency brainstorm, is that the artist formerly known as Jordan is in fact a complex, Janus-like construction. The purpose of her autobiography, she says in the prologue, is to allow the public at large to decide whether she is "the Jordan of the tabloids who doesn't seem to give a toss... or Katie Price, the successful model and single mum who is trying to make the best of things." "Judge for yourself," she concludes, "it's all here."

Of course it's *not* all here. Like her photoshoots, Jordan/Katie's story has been verbally airbrushed, undergone a bit of narrative liposuction and covered in so much make-up it bares scant resemblance to anything approaching real life.

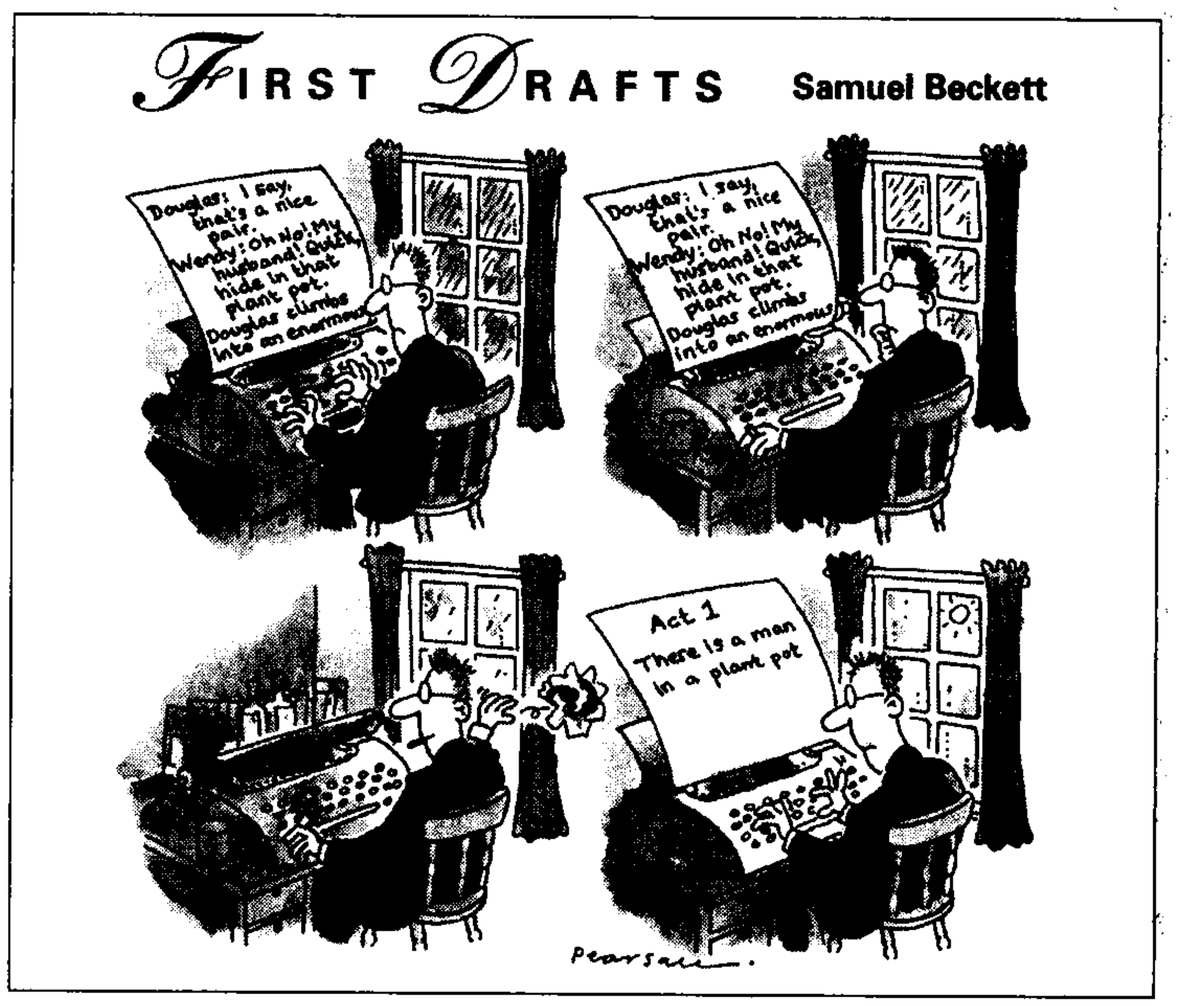
Jordan, we are invited to believe, is a family girl who just wants to be loved. Unfortunately, a succession of men has confused her inner naivety with her 32DD whoppers, and as such, the pattern with Katie and boys is always the same.

They bowl up in a turquoise XR2 and sweep her off her feet with their lovely personalities, toned bodies and bulging wallets. Then they get jealous because their girlfriend is a topless model with a profile as a slapper. The men respond by cheating on Jordan, she finds out and is heart-

broken, resolving never to fall for such a cad again before heading off to look for more reliable sorts like multimillionaire footballers in nightclubs.

Apart from the birth of her blind child Harvey, a run-in with a paedophile photographer and some amusing catfights with Victoria Beckham, these fruitless encounters form the entirety of her life to date. Quite why they all fail remains a mystery – in Jordan's eyes, following the revered autobiographical tradition, it's everyone else's fault: 275 pages yield but one *mea culpa* – "planning to give birth live on the Internet probably wasn't my greatest idea". But then she says it was her manager's idea.

And there you have it – without exception all these B-list trysts are arranged through "managers". The path to true love begins with a fax, a phone call and her people talking to his people. Take her newest love, the Australian pop singer Peter Andre. She tells us that there may well be


FIRST DRAFTS
Samuel Beckett
Douglas: I say, that's a nice pair.
Wendy: Oh No! My husband! Quick, hide in that plant pot.
Douglas climbs into an enormous
Act 1
There is a man in a plant pot
Pearsall

wedding bells soon, before adding: "Appearing on *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here* has turned out to be my chance to change my image. So I've dropped my manager and signed with a new one."

Suddenly we start to see what "Being Jordan" really entails – being strung up like an enamelled marionette and frog-marched through a pre-packaged life by a succession of arch-manipulators. And as manipulations go, this book is a triumph.

Books & Bookmen

■ ASKED by the Mail on Sunday's Night and Day magazine to nominate his five favourite books, one of novelist Joseph O'Connor's choices was A Good Man is Hard to Find – indeed anything, by Flannery O'Connor.

"Nobody whose writing I know," he says of his namesake, "has ever achieved more – his work is beautiful, brave, funny and wise. There is an exactitude in the writing and his metaphors are enormously powerful."

Oh dear. Had O'Connor (J) applied a similar level of exactitude to his reading of the work of O'Connor (F), or even, for that matter, the title of his chosen text, he might have been aware that Flannery O'Connor was a woman.

■ PRIVATELY-educated multi-millionaire Michael Moore, scourge of America's neo-cons, may have had difficulty securing a distributor for his anti-Bush film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, but he's had no problem finding a publisher for his as yet unfinished autobiography.

The film, which took the Palme d'Or at Cannes, was turned down by Disney (it is a US presidential election year, after all) so Moore is counting on Harvey Weinstein, who co-runs Disney subsidiary Miramax, to help get his assault on Bush, Rumsfeld et al shown around the world.

By contrast, HarperCollins has had no hesitation in buying Moore's life story, which it will publish on both sides of the Atlantic. HarperCollins is of course part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, whose newspapers have consistently supported the Bush administration over its war in Iraq.

Nevertheless, full details of Weinstein and Moore's heroic battle to make their voices heard in the face of neo-con opposition will no doubt emerge in serialisations in Murdoch papers as part of the deal. But how much time the pair will devote to promoting their wares on HarperCollins's sister company, patriotic Fox News in the US, remains to be seen...

'Bookworm'

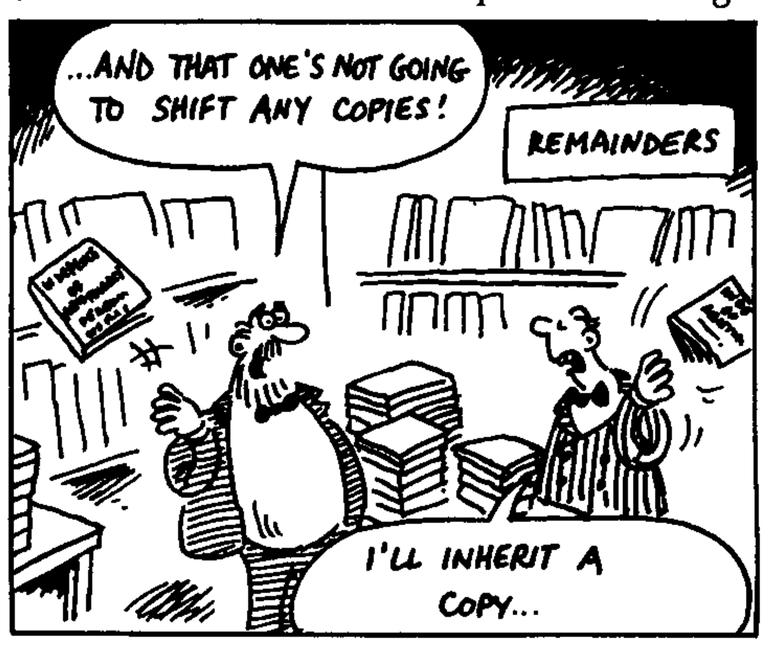
O·B·N

Of all the Old Etonians in the House of Commons today, only Oliver Letwin carries any authority, and what makes him so distinctive, so head and shoulders above his contemporaries, so effortlessly superior, is not what he learned at school but what he learnt from his beautiful American academic mother, Shirley Letwin, rightly famous as the author of that most enthusiastic and eloquent celebration of the English gentleman, her classi work *The Gentleman in Tro Individuality and Moral C* (1982).

PEREGRINE WORST
In Defence of Aristocra

Submitted by Dr S. Wri

£10 paid for entries for the Order of the



WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Rupert Hart-Davis: Man of Letters

Philip Ziegler

(Chatto & Windus, £20)

...It was at this time, with the affairs of the publishing firm that bore his name lurching from one crisis to another, that Hart-Davis began work on his justly celebrated biography of the novelist Hugh Massingberd Twinkie, author of *Droop*, *Dahlias* and *In My Window Box*. The work was congenial to him. As he wrote to his great friend and fellow-Etonian (they shared the distinction of being the only two Lower Boys ever to have been "up" to Silas "Corks" McGarrigle for extra Greek five terms running) Sir Jasper Beamish, "I am having the most glorious time with dear old Hugh and have really found out some fascinating stuff, I think. Did you know, for example, that the old boy collected fabric samples, and had a superstitious fear of beetles? And that the woman to whom *Sad Lilacs* is dedicated was not his cousin but his aunt by marriage? It will all make a wonderful book when the time comes."

Although Rupert Hart-Davis Limited published some works of genuine merit – one might instance Sylvester Dull's *Ezra Pound and Campanology* or Myrtle Loosestrife's sadly neglected novel *Gosh What Larks* – their proprietor's disdain for commercial solvency was, alas, to prove its undoing, and in 1956 the firm was taken over by the more sober-minded concern of Tender & Mainprice.

Something of Hart-Davis's inner disquiet at this period may be detected in the passionate letter he wrote to his long-serving secretary, Miss Eleanor Frisky, whom he later married, while she was away from the office recovering from toothache: "The MCC prospects are, as you say, fairly encouraging, and if Compton can only keep his place he may inject some backbone into what has hitherto been a jolly flabby lot. These Tender & Mainprice chaps are the limit, by the way. Always moaning about money, which, as you know, I simply can't be got to care about. And then at the board luncheon the chairman absolutely ate his asparagus with a fork!"

As might be expected from such a versatile editor, biographer, reviewer and compiler, the extent of Hart-Davis's literary knowledge was formidable. Notwithstanding a natural courtesy, his opinions were always vigorously expressed. He considered *Ulysses*, for example, to be "jolly rot" and Samuel Beckett to be "an absolute rotter". Pride of place in this demonology was reserved for *The Wasteland*. "Quite the worst gardening book I've ever come across," he complained to Beamish. "Lots of jolly good stuff at the start about watering your roots with spring rain but after that I simply couldn't make head or tail of it."

Retiring to the North Yorkshire dales in the mid-1960s, he received news of the conferral of a knighthood. "Dear Rupert," his friend "Boffles" Abercrombie, who had the ear of the court, enquired. "Do you fancy a gong? Just say the word and I'll wangle it with HM." Immensely proud of this decoration, which he rightly adjudged a tribute to his years of unstinting service to the publishing industry, Hart-Davis enjoyed a long and productive retirement, editing the letters of the little-known Victorian *rondelier* poet Esme Dymme, and compiling an eight-volume collection of...

"Blimey! What a lot of books you've got"

LIBRARY NEWS

■ BOOK-LOVERS in Gosport, Hampshire, are grumbling at being turfed out of their library to make way for a refurb to create a Discovery Centre replete with coffee shop, crèche and a "performance space".

For the next year the reference collection can be accessed in a temporary "hut" in the staff car park of the local museum, while other stock and equipment has been sent to other libraries.

Still, Gosport readers should count themselves lucky. In London's Raynes Park the library stock is currently all over the place. After two years of dithering over what to do with the old, damp building, Merton council has sold it to developers who are tearing it down to put up a block of sheltered accommodation – 29 flats – with space for a library on the ground floor. The work will take at least 18 months.

Meanwhile, the books are being kept at a variety of locations, with popular paperbacks at Raynes Park Station and the Raynes Park Tavern, and children's books going to a Methodist church. In the absence of librarians, stickers in the books tell readers: "Please accept this book with the compliments of Merton Library and Heritage Service. You are welcome to keep it or return it."

Raynes Park and West Barnes Residents' Association is unhappy at the absurd give-away of a publicly-funded resource. "No one doubts the goodwill of the station staff, but this is no way to provide a 21st century library service," they said in an open letter. "This is simply not an acceptable temporary substitute for a library."

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

■ HARD times for Lord Birt's hardback, *The Harder Path*, published by Time Warner.

The ex-BBC director-general's £20 book was last spied at Bookcase in Wimbledon, south-west London, on sale for a princely 99p.

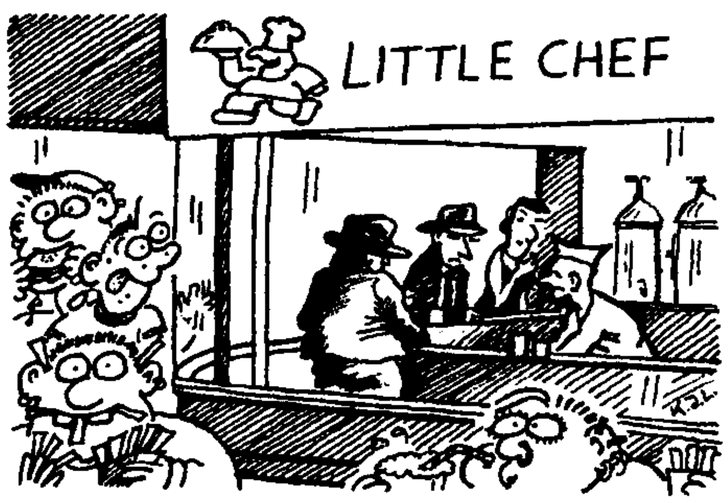
"Can I borrow this please?"

We understand that mordant irony is an inviolable constituent of the modern human condition, and we worshipped his facility with the form.

LUCY MANGAN bids farewell to Chandler in 'Friends', *Guardian*

There are only two subjects in art: space and objects.

ANTONY GORMLEY
Guardian



Little Chefs are in many ways about loneliness; about a particularly English kind of loneliness even. They both represent and are a curious cure for it. Thanks to the unlikely setting of a Little Chef, we can for a time escape some of the constraints of home, of our habits of mind, the rules of sophisticated society – and enjoy a beguiling vision of an alternative life. To identify a common taste in Little Chefs doesn't just mean sharing a taste in restaurants, it means sharing a piece of inner, very private psychology.

ALAIN DE BOTTON
Tate Etc Magazine

Pseuds Corner

The two men appear to be hiding a shared secret, according to Dr Susan Marchant-Haycox, a body language expert. Mr Brown is clearly a man in waiting while Mr Blair has lost confidence.

Part of photo caption, *The Times*

After a long day spent looking at fabrics and computer screens, I don't want to just watch television or go to the cinema; I want to interact with other people. I went to the Oscars ceremony recently just so that I could catch up on what was happening in the movies.

NICKY HASLAM
Harpers and Queen

In a world of terror and anxiety, this is art in a million back yards. There is a real sense that in making your garden 'better' according to your own taste, you are doing more than outdoor decorating: you are making the world a better place for everyone else as well. But the goddess of the garden is Gaia, which connects every gardener with the future – the real, political, breathing future – of this earth. No other domestic activity combines the public with the private so completely.

MONTY DON
Observer

He [Mike Skinner] sits on his own sofa, surrounded by empty Tennant's Special cans, in front of the TV. It breaks down. When he takes the back off to mend it, he finds the lost grand. The money got stuck down there somewhere. One does not have to be a Bible student to realise that the narrative of A Grand Don't Come for Free is constructed around Christ's parable of the lost piece of silver... Half Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, half Samuel Pepys.

PROFESSOR JOHN SUTHERLAND on The Streets' new LP, *Guardian*

This is not just a biography so fine that it convinces the reader that the particular task need never be undertaken again, a study which could justify the art of biography on its own, but quite simply a great book by any standards; great in the way a novel may be great. Elegantly written, psychologically acute, an exuberant projection of a marvellous narrative....[continues] Everyone, whether they are interested in Isherwood or just in the twentieth century, should read this stunning, unflagging, monumental chronicle.

PHILIP HENSHER appraises Peter Parker's biography of Christopher Isherwood, *Spectator*

CONTRIBUTORS: Ron Sutherland, Matthew Phillips, Lesley Hauge, Nadine Cartner, Anon, Gnome, Douglas McCarthy, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THREE WISE MEN TO SEE FAIR PLAY

1. A coat of Varney

THERE is nothing Gordon Brown enjoys more than appointing big businessmen to important government jobs.

When the chancellor announced that David Varney, chairman of the mobile phone company MMO2, is to be executive chairman of the new department merging the Inland Revenue with customs, Brown waxed lyrical. "Mr Varney is an outstanding business leader with a first-rate record proven across the private sector, with a reputation for good management and effective delivery. I know he will have the support of the existing management and staff in the two departments."

He made no mention of the awkward fact that MMO2 is in dispute with customs over hundreds of millions of pounds of VAT rebates it is claiming over money it paid the government for its lucrative 3G, or third generation, phone licence.

When the licences were auctioned in 2000, and no VAT was charged on the fees, naturally no one mentioned or envisaged any rebate. But when the successful companies, including MMO2, went to court to claim compensation for the way the government had run the auction, the judge, while throwing out the claim, said in his ruling that the government had acted "commercially".

The companies claim this meant that the price they paid for the licences included VAT, and so they are demanding a £3.35bn rebate. A VAT tribunal adjourned the case, which is likely to end up in the European court of justice. Customs lawyers fighting this case now know that their new chairman came from a company with a vast interest in the outcome.

Chancellor Brown's plans to sack thousands of customs and tax officers are likely to be resisted sternly by the trade unions. But what is the record of their new boss David Varney in dealing with the unions?

In 1992, while managing director of Shell UK, Varney got in a fearful row with the Transport and General Workers' Union (which, 10 years earlier, had Gordon Brown selected as the Labour candidate for the safe seat of Dunfermline East).

A spokesman for the T&G confirmed to the *Eye* that in September 1993 the union launched a nationwide boycott of Shell petrol stations in protest at union derecognition at the Shell Haven refinery. T&G leaflets denounced Shell's policy, masterminded by Varney, as "an attack on the freedom of association which is fundamental to the basic human rights which Britain insists should be observed in other countries". This tradition was maintained by Varney at MMO2 which, under his chairmanship in 2002, sacked 1,400 workers.

Varney is also the man to deal with the continuing controversy over the Inland Revenue's private finance initiative (PFI) deal with a company in a tax haven. His firm MMO2 was the only bidder for the PFI contract for Airwave, a controversial new radio system for the police. The bid was criticised by the normally cautious national audit office (NAO), which could find no proof that the public sector would not have done the job just as well. The public sector comparator, claimed the NAO, was artificially inflated by "arithmetic errors" and "double counting".

Mr Varney also chairs Prince Charles's Business in the Community and is an ardent advocate of "corporate social responsibility".

2. Winsome Churchill

ANDREW SMITH, secretary of state for work and pensions, is every bit as imaginative as his former boss Gordon Brown when it comes to brown-nosing prominent businessmen.

Announcing the appointment of Lawrence Churchill (right) as chairman of the new pensions protection fund, the government's half-baked scheme for insuring pensions against business disasters, Smith went way over the top. "I am absolutely delighted," he drooled, "that such an important and prominent figure as Lawrence Churchill is taking on this vitally important role. He has a track record of success and commands respect across the financial sector."

Did Smith check the details of that track record? From 1985 to 1991 Lawrence Churchill sat on the board of Allied Dunbar and in 1991, encouraged no doubt by the then Tory government's new social security act which subsidised private pensions, he set up Natwest Life, the pensions arm of the Natwest bank, which immediately started selling private pensions.

Three years later the storm broke over what became known as the pensions mis-selling scandal, in which millions of people were swindled by the reckless selling techniques of greedy insurance and pensions companies. Five million pensions were wrongly sold by this process. And in May 1997, when Labour took office, the new economic secretary to the treasury, Helen Liddell, launched a ferocious assault on the companies responsible for what she later called "possibly the most extensive scandal ever seen in our financial services industry".

She summoned representatives of 24 of the companies, "named and shamed" them and demanded that compensation should be paid without delay. Among the companies that appeared before her were Allied Dunbar and Natwest Life. In November 1997 Liddell revealed that the companies were still slow to pay compensation. Allied Dunbar still had 17,754 cases of alleged swindling that "required review" and Natwest had 13,849. Under pressure from Liddell, the companies speeded up the compensation process.

"No one," trumpeted Liddell, "gets off the hook where mis-selling of private pensions may have occurred." Now, as a sign of the forward march of "new" Labour, a prominent pensions mis-seller of the Tory years is to take charge of its pensions protection fund.

3. Troup in

AS PART of its plan to clear up the embarrassing problem of special political advisers, the government has appointed a former Tory special adviser as a full-blown civil servant.

He is Edward Troup (right), former special political adviser to Tory chancellor Ken Clarke, and his new job under "new" Labour is as director of business and indirect tax at the treasury.

Since the Tories lost office in 1997, Troup has been a partner at Simmons and Simmons, a City law firm which advertises its skills at "tax planning". No doubt Gordon Brown hopes his new man will back the government's plan to crack down on tax avoidance. But can he be sure?

When the government published its new disclosure rules last month, Mr Troup was quoted in the *Times* as saying: "This bill is a complete cop-out. On the basis that these rules have been prescribed, the treasury can designate anything it wants as a tax shelter." No doubt Mr Troup can put that right when he's back on the inside.

That's all, old folks

BACK in January *Eye* 1096 told how a penny-pinching decision by the legal services commission (LSC), the body which dishes out legal aid to solicitors, had put hundreds of people living in care homes for the elderly at risk of untimely and unhappy deaths.

The LSC had ruled that it would not fund Hossacks, a small Northamptonshire-based firm of solicitors specialising in legal challenges to the closure of old folks' homes, to undertake any work outside the East Midlands region.

The firm had fought scores of actions on behalf of elderly residents all over the country, because it is one of very few law firms willing to take on such unprofitable cases and with the requisite specialist knowledge. Campaigners for the elderly believe care home closures must be prevented whenever possible, because research has shown that residents of old folks' homes who are moved into unfamiliar surroundings against their will are twice as likely to die in the succeeding 12 months as oldies who are able to stay put.

legal services COMMISSION

Since our story appeared the LSC has demanded the return of £33,000 – 61 percent of the expenses paid to the firm in the last year. Solicitor Yvonne Hossack has had to make the rest of her staff redundant and is now funding the work from her personal savings.

Late last year Hossack wrote to the minister at the department of constitutional affairs who is responsible for the LSC, David Lammy, to complain that she believed her firm was being deliberately targeted as part of a cost-cutting exercise. Not true, replied Lammy on 18 December: "The LSC accepts that there will be many occasions upon which Community Care cases may justify travelling time and costs... subject to the sufficient benefit test and to the need to approach the work in a sensible and realistic manner."

In fact it was Lammy's statement that was untrue. Using the data protection act Hossack has managed to extract a thick file of emails and memos about her firm from the LSC. They reveal that as far back as September last year LSC staff were discussing ways in which her work could be curbed. On 24 October – two months before Lammy's letter – a meeting took place at which it was decided to impose travel restrictions on *all* Hossacks' cases outside the East Midlands area.

On 15 October 2003, Alison Macnair, a solicitor at the LSC's London HQ, emailed her colleague Brian Stone in Nottingham about the need to stop "solicitors rampaging far and wide across the country taking on work in areas in which they profess expertise..." The following day Stone emailed Macnair warning that the attempt to cut off Hossacks' funds must be watertight "because Hossack will challenge us without hesitation and if we lose or concede on the basis of a technical error it will only encourage her to pursue her eccentric path free of any constraint".

Armed with proof that the LSC had plotted to impose a travel ban on her work, Hossack presented it to the minister, David Lammy, in a letter in April. Last week he replied: "I was most concerned by your suggestion that a blanket travel restriction had been applied to all your cases... and have now been assured this is not the case."

Someone, clearly, is not telling the truth. The idea that politicians and civil servants would deliberately deny vulnerable old and disabled people access to justice simply to save a few thousand pounds is unthinkable. Isn't it?

DRUG SAFETY

Yellow fever

ANNOUNCING plans to boost drug safety by finally allowing patients to report adverse reactions to drugs and vaccines, health chiefs said how disappointed they were at the public's apparent lack of interest in a pilot reporting scheme that ran in south-east London.

Dr Jeremy Metters (left), former deputy chief medical officer and the man in charge of a review of the "yellow card" reporting system, said: "We can only speculate why participation has been so poor."

Over 15 months there were just 39 reports of adverse reactions to NHS Direct in Beckenham. But Metters and others should not have been surprised by this. Hardly anybody in the area had heard of the scheme – not even doctors or pharmacists. As one resident said: "My own local GP surgery did not know about it until they read about it in last week's *BMJ*." And as a pharmacist put it: "What scheme? Never heard of it."

The current next-to-useless drug safety system, whereby doctors fill in a yellow card if they suspect a drug or vaccine has caused an adverse reaction, certainly needs improving: it picks up only a tiny fraction of bad reactions. It failed to detect outbreaks of meningitis caused by the first batches of MMR vaccine (subsequently withdrawn in Britain) and, more recently, it failed to detect dangers associated with the anti-psychotic, thioridazine, or with the new generation of anti-depressants.

Nevertheless health minister Lord Warner, announcing the greater involvement of patients, ignored the system's failings and described it as "one of the best spontaneous reporting schemes in the world".

While NHS Direct would have been an ideal body to collate reports of adverse incidents, Metters and colleagues have seized on Beckenham's "poor response" and suggested that reporting might be improved if patients have direct access to the new Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHPA). Unfortunately this would mean that information, and control of that information, would go straight to the body which, with its advisory arm, the Committee on the Safety of Medicine, has been criticised for its secrecy, conflicts of interest and past failings.

Key figures on both bodies have consultancy, research, financial or employment links with the big drug companies. For example, the MHPA's top man is Professor Sir Alasdair Breckenridge, who used to advise GlaxoSmithKline, the manufacturer of the antidepressant Seroxat. It was the failure of the drug regulators to warn doctors earlier about potential problems associated with Seroxat that led to the recent resignation in protest of Richard Brook, the lay member on the CSM.

The scandal prompted Charles Medawar of consumer group Social Audit and author of *Medicines Out Of Control*, to suggest that it was Sir Alasdair who should have resigned. But he didn't.

To the Manor torn

LAST month dozens of blind and visually-impaired people marched on the Royal National Institute for the Blind's London HQ in an unprecedented protest at the charity's plan to shut Manor House, its pioneering rehabilitation centre in Torquay.

Many of those who travelled from across the UK to the protest were only able to do so because of the help they have received from the centre in transforming their lives. For more than 60 years blind and partially-sighted people at Manor House have been helping others – mostly those who have suddenly lost their sight – to overcome the trauma and acquire the skills and confidence they need to maintain their lives and jobs.

It has helped people like Ernie Gray, a senior local government officer who suddenly lost his sight because of undiagnosed glaucoma; and Bruce Cowling, who lost three-quarters of his sight from illness and who, like many others who went to Manor House, had originally felt "life was over". Both scorn the RNIB's claim that by moving services into partnership with Somerset College of Arts and Technology, it is "proving its commitment to blind and partially sighted people".

Many people who are trying to come to terms with their blindness and relearning basic tasks like how to use domestic appliances, will not have the courage or skills to enter a further education college. They need the more "front-line" help of Manor House to feel confident enough to rejoin the sighted world.

As ever, it's all down to money. The bulk of Manor House funding came from government contracts, through Jobcentres and training units for those who are close to applying for jobs in the open labour market. However, Manor House also gets large numbers of referrals from disability advisers of people who require much higher levels of support than the contract funding allows. "In doing so we have effectively provided an enhanced service on a financially subsidised basis," says a letter from the RNIB to staff explaining the closure.

As the Torbay Lib Dem MP Adrian Sanders said in the Commons: "Isn't that precisely what the RNIB is for? Isn't that what donors give their money for? And if the charity doesn't provide those services, who will?"

The issue has caused splits at the RNIB's £8m headquarters in Judd Street, London, and recently led to the resignation of the treasurer for the last six years, David Gadbury. He told BBC Radio 4's *In Touch* programme he was concerned about the impact closing high profile services might have on donors. "It's possible that it may not be such an attractive organisation to give money to." That would be a real double whammy.

BATS and balls

FORMER Tory chancellor Ken Clarke tops up his modest MP's salary with £125,000 a year from British American Tobacco, where his duties include chairing BAT's "corporate social responsibility" committee.

"We're dedicated to being a responsible company in a controversial industry," brags BAT. But a different picture emerges from Bat's Big Wheeze, an "annual report" on the company created by health campaigners and aid agencies.

The report details the company's failure to protect workers and communities all over the world. It includes an investigation by Christian Aid that found Brazilian children as young as six at risk from nicotine and pesticide poisoning by Souza Cruz, a wholly-owned BAT subsidiary. The report also publishes evidence of widespread environmental damage caused by BAT, notably in Nigeria and Kenya.

BAT boasts that the number of legal actions against it slowing, though the greatest of all these actions – a claim against several tobacco companies from the US government for tens of billions of pounds under the "Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations" law – is due to start in September.

BRITISH AMERICAN TOBACCO

US government lawyers are keen to interview BAT's faithful lawyer, Andrew Foyle, of the big city of London solicitors Lovells. They allege that he played "a central role in the creation and implementation of document-destruction policies implemented to protect BAT and its affiliates". Mr Foyle refused to be interviewed voluntarily, so the US lawyers went to the high court.

In two very expensive cases, Mr Foyle pleaded "privilege"; but Mr Justice Moore-Bick held that he could be interviewed. In March the court of appeal upheld this judgment, so some time this summer Mr Foyle must face the US lawyers to answer allegations that he destroyed documents that incriminated BAT.

Follow-ups... Follow-ups... Follow-ups... Follow-ups...

■ **EYE TOLD YOU SO:** When *Eye* 1105 reported how the government's Highways Agency had asked the owners of the new privately-financed section of the M6 to cut toll charges when roadworks caused disruption on the old M6, we warned that the nature of PFI meant tolls were more likely to rise than fall – a reality which seemed to have escaped the Highways Agency.

But the PFI penny now seems to have dropped. On 17 May the *Times* reported: "Britain's only privately-owned motorway is to raise the toll for cars by 50 percent just as roadworks cause major tailbacks on the alternative route."

■ **WAR PENSIONS:** Two years ago the *Eye* raised the case of former trooper Roger Viggers, who was badly injured in a road accident while serving overseas in 1973. He applied for a war pension but was told he was not entitled to one.

In May 1995, a colleague told him he *was* entitled to a pension, and so he applied again. This time he was told he was entitled to a pension but it could not be backdated to the time he was injured. He was also told by the then parliamentary under secretary for the army, Lewis Moonie, that he could not appeal. Hence the title to the *Eye* article, Meanie Moonie.

Mr Viggers stuck to his claim and found a way to appeal. On 9 March the pensions appeal tribunal allowed the appeal, and Mr Viggers *can* get his pension backdated to 1973 – a sum not unadjacent to £20,000.

■ **SHIPPING:** THE UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has made a "derisory" offer of compensation to an Isle of Man (IOM) family whose fishing vessel was wrongly rated as safe to go to sea, even though it was a potential death trap.

The case of Dante and Joan Spadoni, who bought the Suzanna D in Portsmouth in 1999, featured in *Eye* 1097, in January. The MCA oversaw refurbishment and testing of the boat, granting it a safety certificate before it was allowed to head for Manx waters. The IOM Marine Administration, however, had concerns about the boat's stability and performed its own tests – finding "massive stability failure". Further investigation revealed that all stability tests carried out during the 1990s had shown the boat to be unstable, but the MCA had granted certificates anyway.

When the Eye last reported the case, the MCA was still disputing the need for the boat to be retested. In February the island's chief minister told the Spadoni's Member of the House of Keys (the island's equivalent of an MP) John Rimington that a "substantial offer" of compensation for their loss of livelihood was on the way.

A debate on the subject in the Tynwald, the island's parliament, was cancelled and everyone was delighted that the saga might be over. However, when the offer arrived it was a fraction of the lowest possible figure that had been suggested.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown and the treasury would have us believe they are about to deliver a killer blow to the tax avoidance industry.

Newspapers are full of stories about the targeting of multinational tax avoiders and the accountants and lawyers who create and sell the tax schemes that enable them to legally decide how much tax companies and millionaires pay (or more likely do not pay).

From August tax scheme peddlers will have to notify the Inland Revenue of their latest wheeze so the taxman can close any loophole before it is abused. This follows the recent closure of those tax loopholes which enabled lucrative bonuses to avoid or defer income tax, including the employee benefit trust and Gilt strip schemes reported in previous *Eye* articles. Bean counters and legal eagles are up in arms whinging – in public at least – about this new and unfair regime.

But how much of a change is this likely to create? Not much in the view of some tax professionals. They point out that there will now be even more money-making opportunities for the tax Bar to advise on when is a scheme not a scheme and so not notifiable to the Revenue! Other practitioners are confident that, subject to consideration of the all-important regulations that follow the finance bill, even some versions of tax schemes supposedly banned will still work.

They also point to the United States where supposedly tough anti-avoidance rules have been in place for years, including disclosure to the Internal Revenue Service. Nevertheless between 1993 and 1999 tax schemes still cost the US treasury an estimated £50bn, according to a report by the General Accounting Office (GAO) watchdog. And last month the GAO reported that 61 percent of US companies paid *no* federal income tax at all between 1996 and 2000 during a period of unparalleled prosperity.

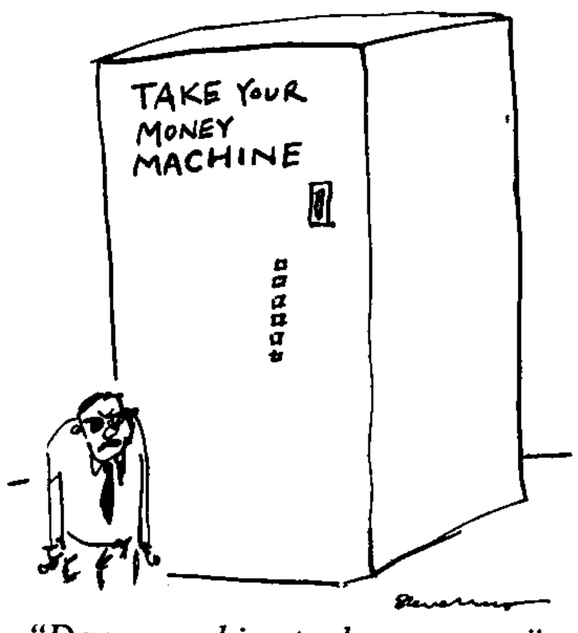
Just how big a mountain tax avoidance is to climb in the absence of a general anti-avoidance law (the route taken by Australia and Canada) is illustrated by the story of how prominent individuals were recruited by the London office of a leading firm of US lawyers to help some of America's richest avoid up to $500m in tax.

Sir Geoffrey Leigh, longtime chairman of Allied London Properties, former Tory party treasurer and trustee of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation was most involved. So too was a Nicholas Wills, presumably no relation to the one-time chairman of business services conglomerate BET.

The lawyers who helped devise the scheme were Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. The needy would-be non-taxpayers were the partners of Long Term Capital Management, the $100bn offshore hedge fund whose threatened collapse in 1998 after the Russian rouble crisis forced a Federal Reserve Bank-imposed Wall Street rescue to avoid a feared global meltdown.

The LTCM partners, led by legendary fund manager John Meriwether, are currently awaiting the ruling by a US federal judge in New Haven, Connecticut, as to whether the clever tax scheme involving Leigh and Wills is legal and so works. Judgment was reserved after a trial in June and July last year.

LTCM partners claimed $107m in tax losses generated by the scheme against their 1997 income. This was disallowed by the US taxman who instead claimed $40m in tax and a further possible $35m in interest and penalties. The LTCM partners paid the bill and are now trying to claw it back on the basis that the losses were legitimate, backed up by opinions from top tax lawyers and accountants.



"Damn machine took my money"

Just how unreal the world of tax avoidance can be is amply illustrated by the details of the tax avoidance scheme Meriwether and friends used as set out by the IRS in court documents.

At its centre was a Turks & Caicos Island tax haven company, Onslow Trading & Commercial. Leigh, Wills and Dominique Lubar, the interior designer wife of Morgan, Lewis senior tax partner Charles Lubar, who ran Onslow, were the owners and directors of the company. However, they appear to have put up only $7,500 of capital to play in this $500m game. The more meaningful capital of up to $4m was provided by US investment bankers Babcock & Brown or one of its partners.

Onslow was created in 1994 by B&B and Morgan, Lewis to participate in a series of "lease stripping" transactions starting in 1995. "Lease stripping" has long been a popular corporate tax avoidance device. The schemes had catchy acronyms like CHIPS (Computer Hardware Investment Programmes), TRIPS (Tractor Investment Programmes) and SCIPS (Semi-Conductor Investment Programmes). Between 1994 and 2000 these generated more than $600m in tax deductible lease payments.

The scheme involved Onslow leasing computers from General Electric Capital which were already leased to end users. Onslow then sub-leased its rights under these deals to US partnerships formed by B&B. Onslow was pre-paid 92.5 percent of the $100m in rent due from the end-users by the partnerships.

Because Onslow was an offshore company it paid no US tax on the rent prepayments. Under UK law prepayments are not taxable until the rent is actually paid. Onslow transferred its interest in the leases before this occurred so also avoided any UK tax.

The US partnerships were funded with loans by an offshore unit of Barclays Bank to make the rental pre-payments to Onslow. These loans were guaranteed by GE, the original lessor of the computers. The money received by Onslow was deposited in Barclays accounts and could only be withdrawn by GE. The rental payments made by the end users were then used to make payments on the bank loans in what the IRS described as a "circular transfer of funds".

So far, so complex but routine. However, the US tax losses were of no use to Onslow. It had to find a US buyer who could use those deductions. So in a new wrinkle Onslow then swapped its interests in the computer leases and bank accounts for preferred shares in four major US companies looking to shelter profits from tax on the basis of $1m of shares for $100m of tax deductible rentals.

The four companies were that old *Eye* favourite Electronic Data Services, PR and advertising giant Interpublic, US-French chemical group Rhone-Poulenc Rorer and credit card company Advanta. The four companies expected to receive around $100m each in tax deductions courtesy of the computer leases for which the IRS maintained they had "no real economic outlay". In return for fees and other costs estimated at a maximum $12m, each company expected to generate a tax saving of $40m from the $100m deduction.

Onslow also entered into sale-and-leaseback transactions involving retail colossus Wal-Mart, which owns Asda supermarkets, and a fleet of its delivery trucks. The trucks were sold by Wal-Mart to two US banks who immediately leased them to Onslow which sub-leased the same trucks back to Wal-Mart who guaranteed the offshore company's loans from the banks that made the deal possible. These leases were also swapped for preferred shares in the four companies.

Now came the master stroke invented by B&B: a double dip in which the same tax deductions would be used again – this time by LTCM, which was making huge trading profits and faced a near 40 percent tax rate.

In 1996 Onslow swapped its preferred stock in the four US companies for a partnership interest in Long Term Capital. Although the preferred shares were only valued at $5m, Onslow maintained they represented tax deductions worth at least $375m and possibly as much as $500m. LTCM then sought to utilise those losses again in December 1997 by selling a first tranche of $1m worth of preferred shares and claiming $107m from the underlying tax deductions generated by the lease-strips. The remaining $275-$400m would no doubt have been claimed had LTCM not collapsed.

Once again the IRS maintained even the Onslow investment was a circular and therefore

THE DIRECTORS

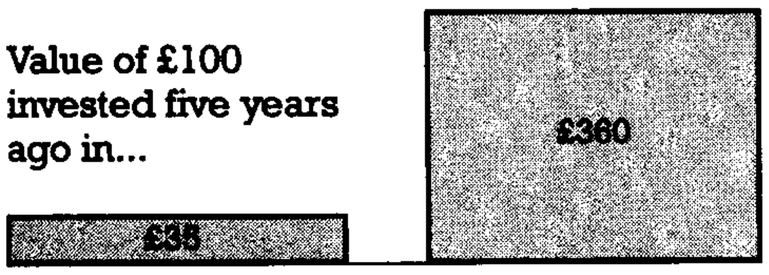
DREDGE & RIGG

I DON'T BELIEVE BEING POOR IS ANY OBSTACLE TO SUCCESS TODAY...
TAKE ME FOR EXAMPLE...
I'M A VERY POOR CHIEF EXEC BUT IT HASN'T DONE ME ANY HARM!
163.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Lara Croft: another Great British Success



artificial transaction. In order to make its investment Onslow was loaned $9m of the $10m invested in LTCM at generous rates and given "put" options to ensure it would not lose money. This was said by the IRS to be the first time LTCM had loaned money to an investor.

Furthermore, in October 1997 Onslow sold its partnership back to LTCM and departed with a 22 percent profit after just 14 months on its Long Term "investment". Just how much Onslow made is unclear but could be around $1m after repayment of loans and fees. The Onslow exit too was orchestrated, according to the IRS, which maintained that had Onslow remained a partner in LTCM then it, and not the hedge fund, would have had to claim the tax deduction.

Sir Geoffrey Leigh was much involved in the discussions with LTCM. He communicated with Meriwether and met Nobel prize winner Myron Scholes, one of the brains behind LTCM and the Onslow investment, in London. Economist Scholes is married to a B&B lawyer. He won the Nobel with fellow LTCM partner Robert Merton for inventing the method used for valuing stock market options.

Leigh was described, not surprisingly, as having "good connections in the UK". However, the Onslow deal was described as a one-off despite Leigh's "stature". It was unique because so good was the Onslow deal in the view of Meriwether and his partners that they reopened the Long Term Capital partnership which had been closed to other investors to let in Onslow.

LTCM and Onslow deny any wrongdoing and insist the Onslow transactions do have economic reality and so are legal and bona fide deductions that have been supported by their lawyers and accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers and those friends of Enron and others, Arthur Andersen. In addition to Meriwether and Scholes, the Onslow partners also clearly relied on advice from Morgan, Lewis that the scheme was legal and appropriate.

But the opinions of all those lawyers and Nobel prize winners were contested by another Nobel prize winner, fellow economist Joseph Stiglitz. He testified for the IRS at the trial last year that there was no economic use for bringing Onslow into the transaction between GE Capital and the computer users. "What I found quite peculiar was when you look at the flows of money they don't serve a purpose," declared Stiglitz. He concluded that Meriwether and LTCM only entered into the Onslow deal to save millions in tax. "Economists are experts in rational behavior. We focus not on what people say but what they do."

John Meriwether and his former partners at LTCM, plus his little helpers at Onslow, must be hoping that Judge Janet Bond Arterton does not reach a similar conclusion.

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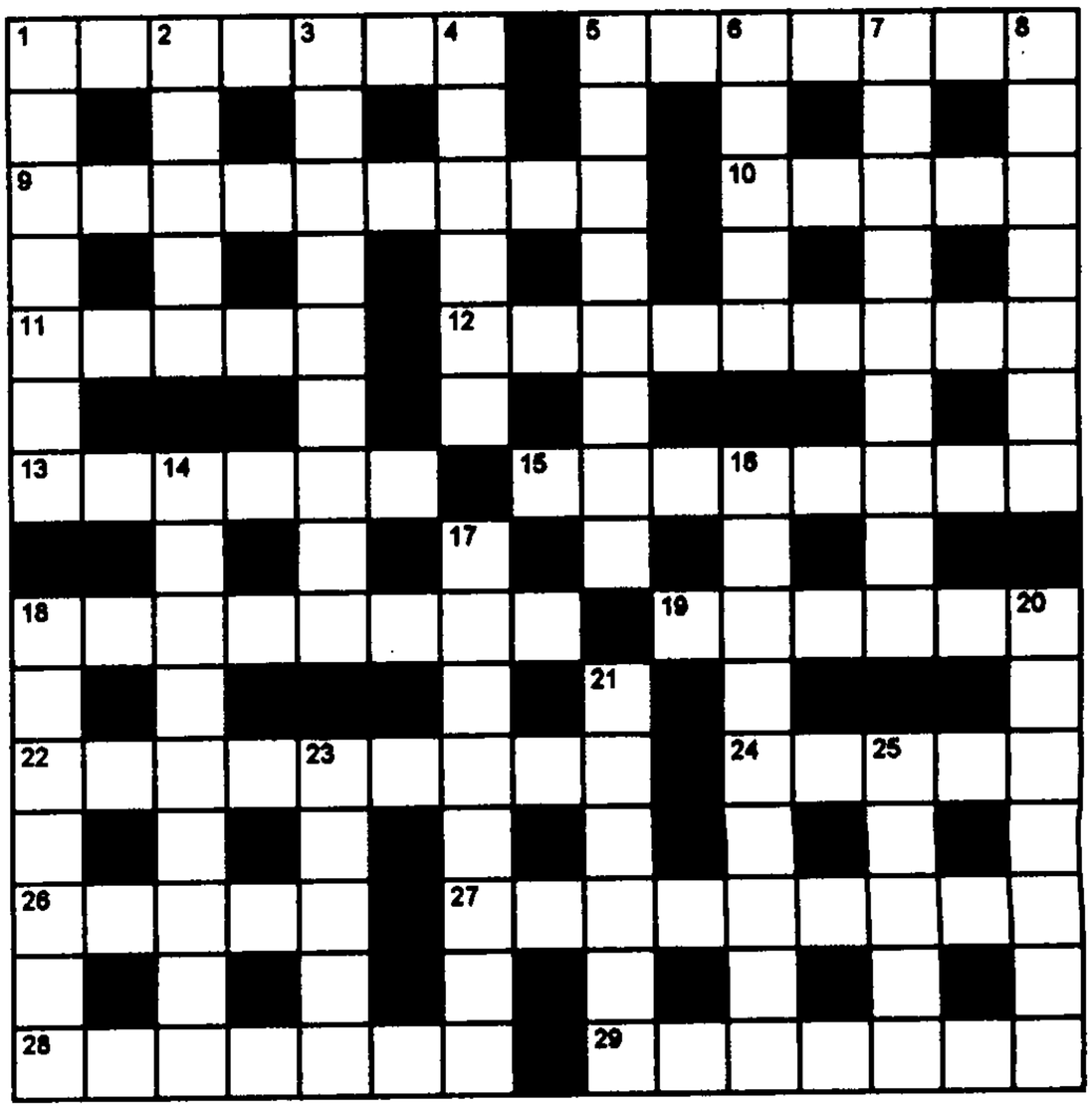


ACROSS

1 Erection's occurred, but makes a mess of it (5,2)
5 Bastards repulsed by mother's blemishes (7)
9/10/21/18ac. Not the politician's stock response Paxman would get from Howard? (2,4,3,5,2,4,8)
11 Boycott got erect holding one .. (5)
12 Dukes' restraining apparatus, giving employee smacks (9)
13 Old man gets hots – awful, it makes you sad (6)
15 Fanny's just about covered by such material things (1-7)
18 See 9
19 Takes the piss; makes a meal of it (6)
22 Having a problem being popular head of airline, Branson, possibly (2,1,6)
24 Idi Amin snapped "I'm off for the country" (5)
26 First of two Eye cartoonists to have a slash? (5)
27 Knackered Dicky hated sex with university's principal (9)
28 Name some leaden tit "Leonard" (7)
29 Old master's "Get knotted!" at game (7)

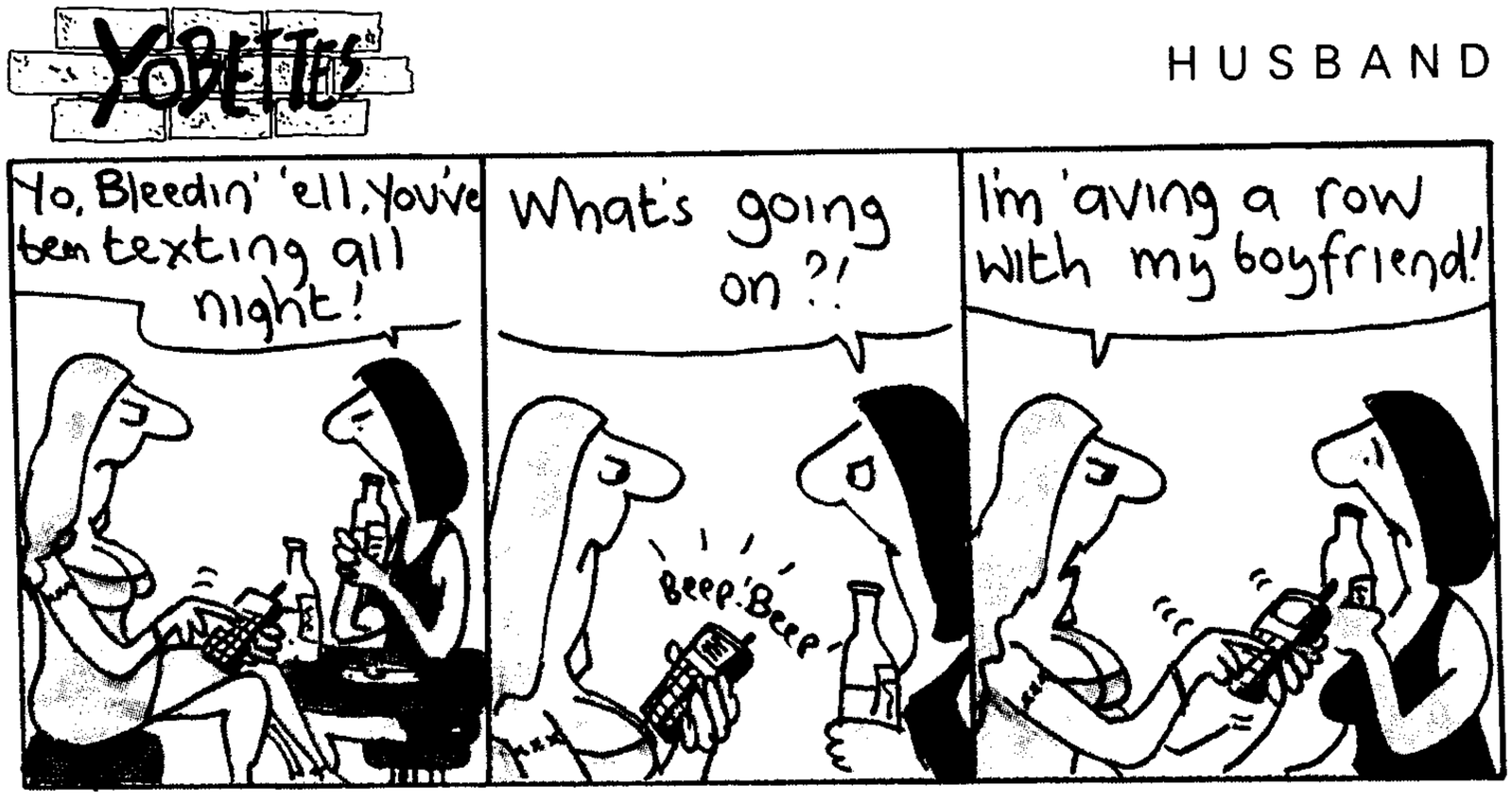
DOWN

1 Cheerful cry from bird when, after church, one raised pussy satisfaction indicator (7)
2 Leader of Conservatives' small talk brings tears to the eyes (2,3)
3 Patsy giving 'southern' head to old lecher (9)
4 Extremely sexy companion penetrates Teletubby – what a shocker! (6)
5 Self-satisfaction of US G-men getting pissed with secret police (8)
6 Is Monica finally over Bill (one spared the ultimate sacrifice)? (5)
7 Force, off recklessly capturing peacekeepers, engage in piss-taking (4,3,2)
8 They love making others smart (7)
14 Shrink from getting topless, rather unstable and pissed, we hear (9)
16 Coarse about Church-backed plonker's political correctness? (9)
17 Hooker getting screwed in outskirts of Lechlade – I say! (4,4)
18 Wham-bam-thank-you-maam (with the deepest feelings, that is) (7)
20 Unnamed bastard (2,3,2)
21 See 9 Across
23 Awkward feature of bent penis having an erection ... (5)
25 ... Dot sadly going without sex amounts to the same thing (5)

Crossword 261 winner: PETER BAINES

ACROSS: 1/5/11 A week is a long time in politics 9 Skoda 10 Menopause 13 Son of a gun 16 Titan 17 Unfit 19 Stateless 21 A bit of all right 25 Insurgent 26 Ogler 27 Gen up 28 Odyssey.

DOWN: 1 Arse 2 Etonian 3 Knave 4 Semen 5 Appointee 6 Oculist 7 Greasiness 8 Insomnia 12 Osculating 14 Fit to drop 15 Gossamer 18 Frisson 20 Exhales 22 Lotto 23 Irony 24 Orgy.



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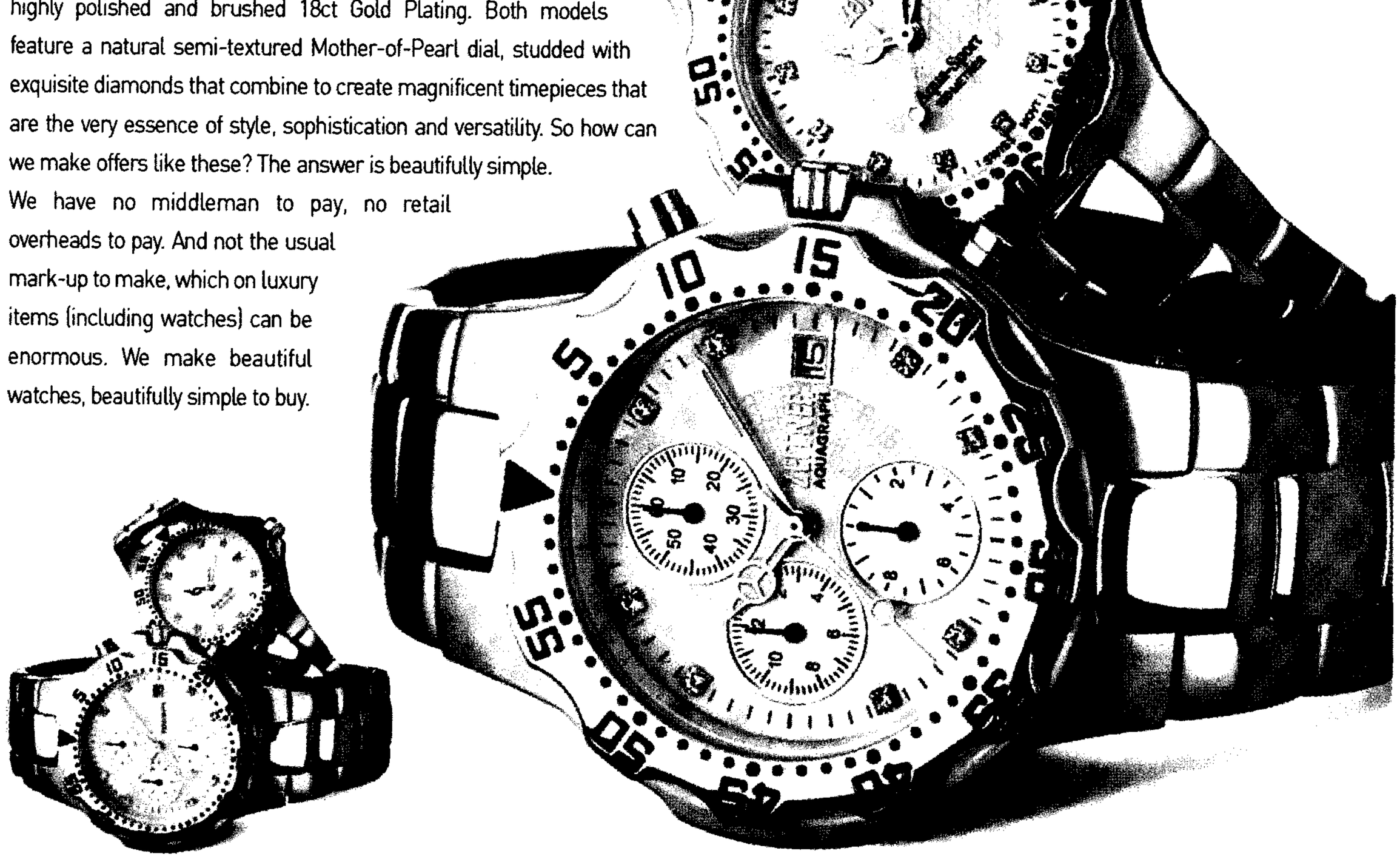

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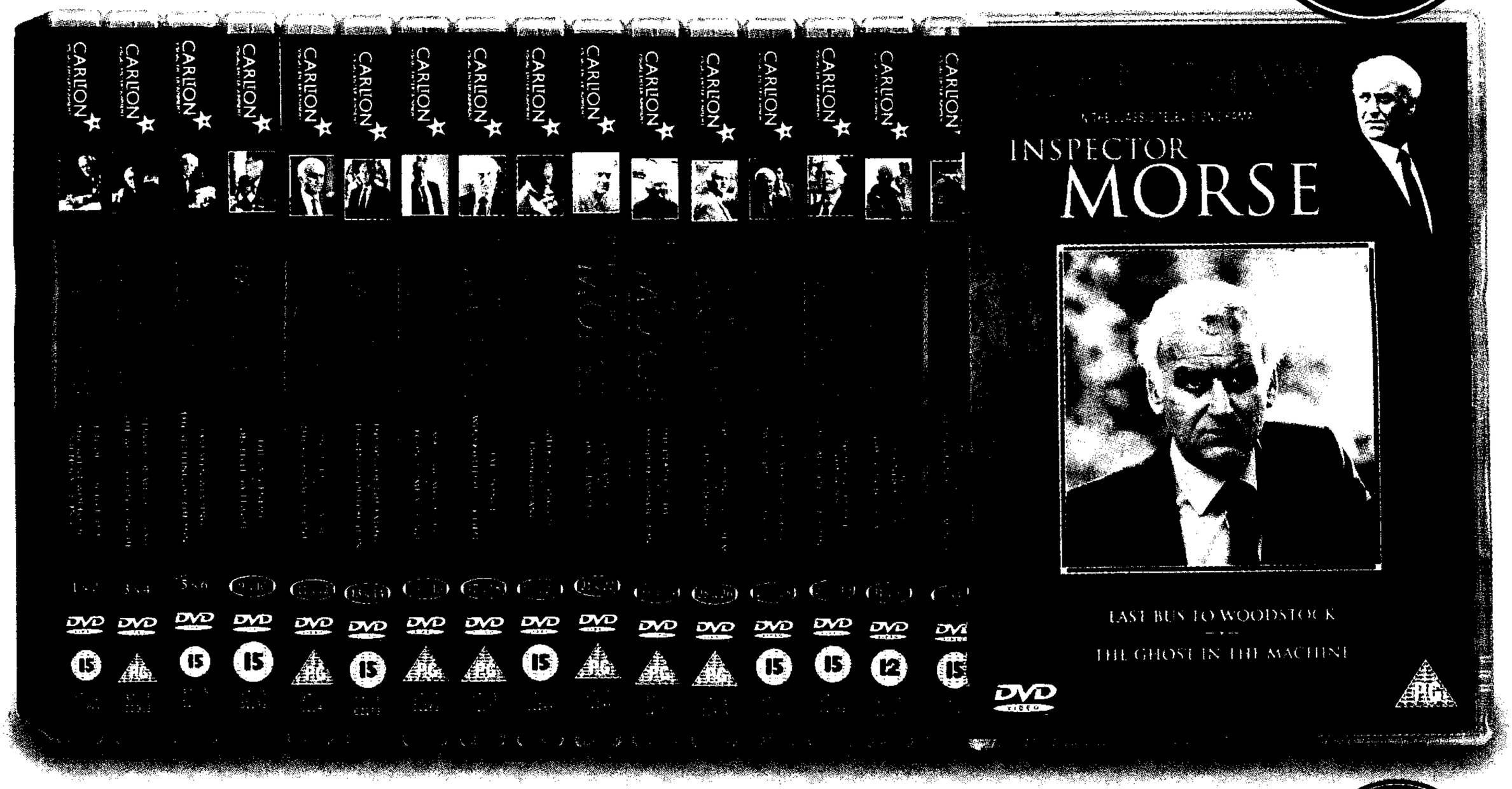

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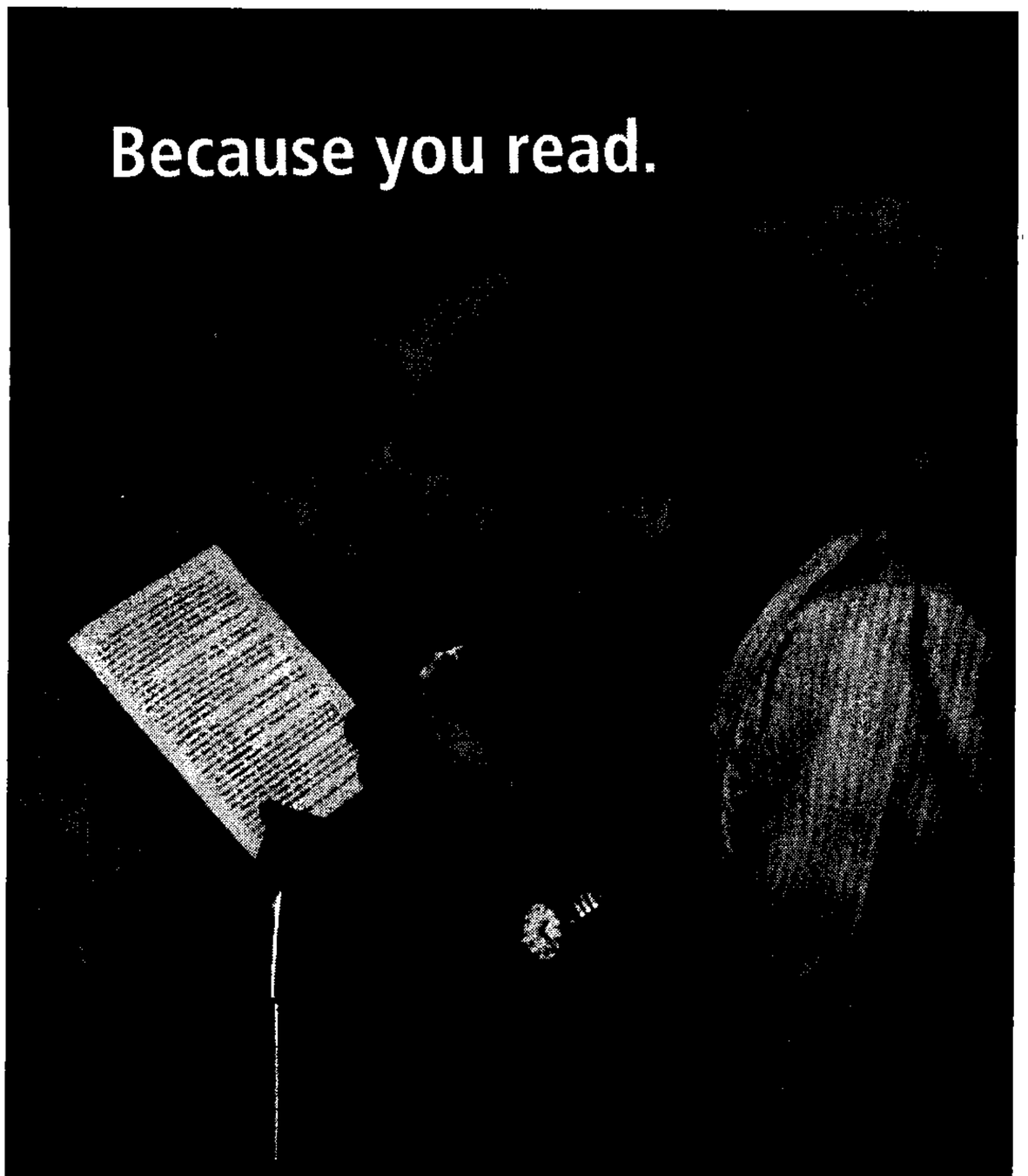

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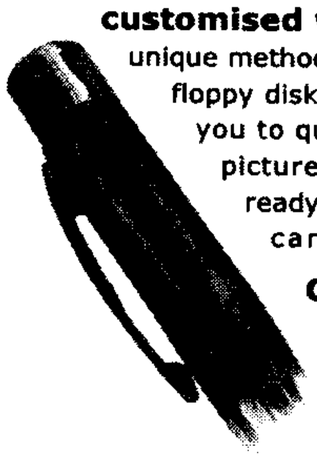

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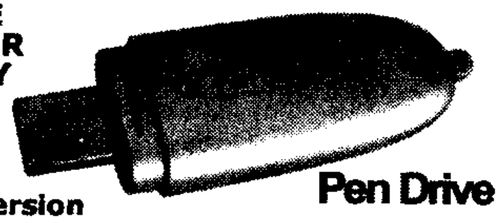

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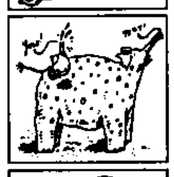

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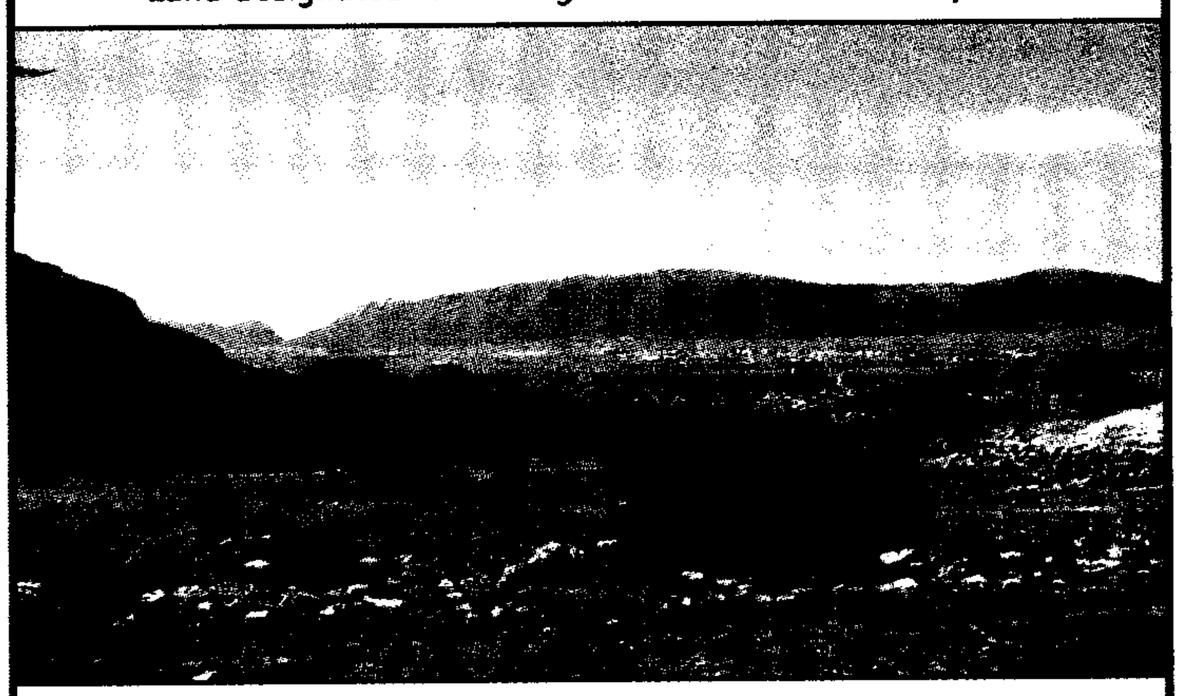

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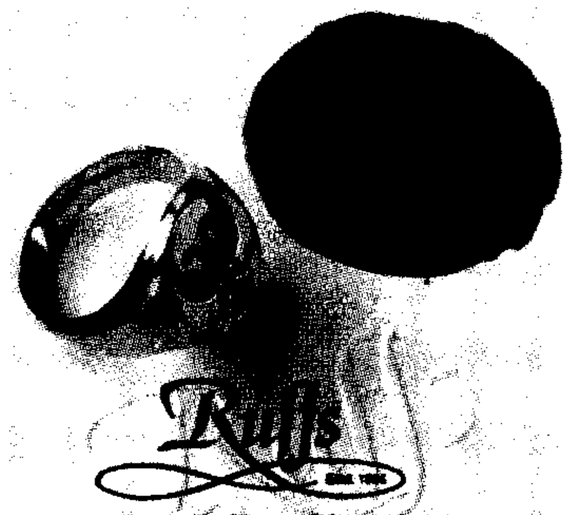

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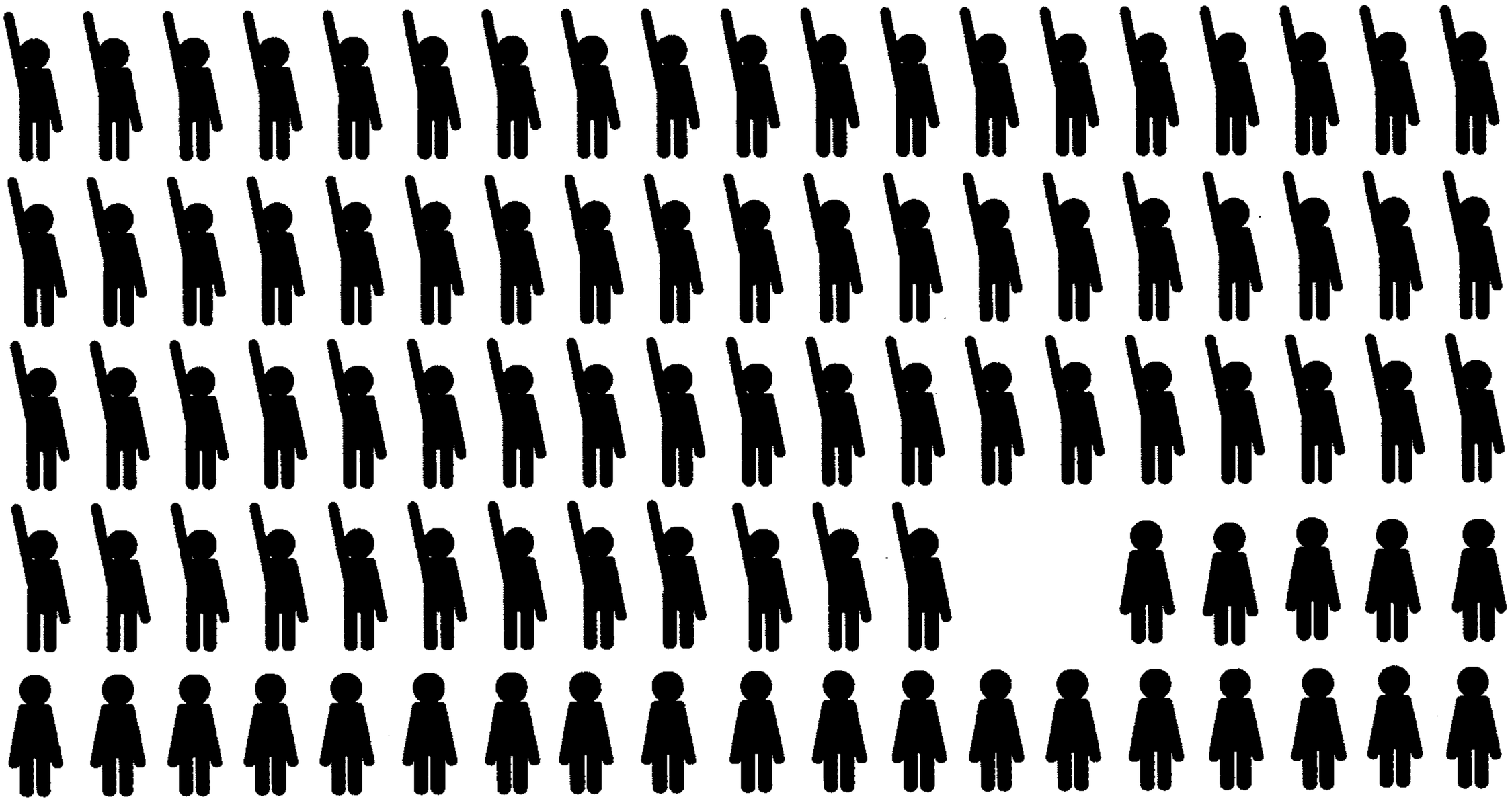

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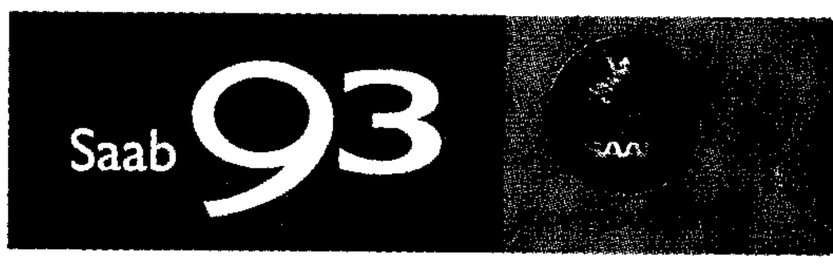

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